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IN QUEST

OF A CREED



IN QUEST OF A CREED

"TRUTH, which only doth judge itself, teacheth that the inquiry of truth, which is the love-making or wooing of it—the knowledge of truth, which is the presence of it—and the belief of truth, which is the enjoying of it—is the sovereign good of human nature."—
BACON'S ESSAYS.



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E R R A T A.

- Page 7, line 6, *for* "preliminary," *read* "palmary."
- " 12, " 13, omit comma after "one."
- " 15, " 7, *for* "there," *read* "then."
- " 16, " 13, insert a comma after "investigates."
- " 16, " 14, insert a comma after "simple."
- " 19, " 5, *for* "fact," *read* "conception."
- " 19, " 7, *for* "distinct nature," *read* "nature distinct."
- " 30, note, *for* "note," *read* "non."
- " 39, line 10, *after* "and," *insert* "the."
- " 41, " 3, *for* "these," *read* "there."
- " 51, " 3, *for* "conscientiously," *read* "unconsciously."
- " 87, " 9, *for* "can," *read* "must."
- " 95, " 4, *for* "read," *read* "need."
- " 95, " 14, *for* "one," *read* "our."
- " 96, " 6, *for* "one," *read* "our."
- " 97, " 17, *for* "March," *read* "Marsh."
- " 100, last line of note, insert a comma after "them."
- " 108, line 17, insert a comma after "suitable."
- " 119, " 2, *for* "collocation," *read* "collocation."
- " 137, " 17, *for* "mysteries," *read* "mysterious."
- " 140, " 20, *for* "interpet," *read* "interpret."
- " 141, " 5, *for* "gratuitous," *read* "fortuitous."
- " 145, " 14, *for* "had," *read* "has."
- " 148, " 14, insert a comma after "lurk."
- " 170, " 11, *for* "confessed by," *read* "confessedly."
- " 174, " 5, *for* "even," *read* "ever."
- " 175, " 7, *for* "ise," *read* "ire."
- " 175, " 8, *for* "posere," *read* "ponere."
- " 178, " 10, *for* "Nassi," *read* "Nam."



IN QUEST OF A CREED

PREFATORY NOTICE

THE writer of the following pages was brought up within the circle of fairly strict Evangelical orthodoxy. During his early years he had no thought of pastures beyond the pale of ordinary Protestant doctrine ; the still waters flowing, to his apprehension, from the Christian Bible, quenched such spiritual thirst as he was conscious of. His teachers were not, so far as he is aware, exercised by doubts : his exemplars of the religious life were all of the good old orthodox order. For him, as for the Caliph of old, the one book of his veneration contained all necessary truth ; although, unlike that worthy, whose burning zeal, if he be not belied, wrought such irreparable mischief to the world, he had at no time of his life a desire to destroy, as

useless or even noxious rubbish, all other literary treasures.* But years and study brought before his mind questions which, perhaps, in all ages have engaged and perplexed, certainly at the present day are engaging and perplexing, the minds as of ordinary persons so of men of the highest culture and of the rarest intellectual gifts. Into the vortex of conflicting currents of thought he has plunged, and emerging thence with a certain stock of definite convictions clinging to him, has had the opportunity, he fancies, of making himself acquainted with some at least of the weak points, some also of the points of vantage, as to establishing belief, presented in turn to the inquiring mind by various systems of opinion. The present purpose of the writer is to place on record the result of certain of his investigations, and to exhibit to others the effect on his own mind of the survey of several leading lines of thought connected with fundamental religious questions.

At the outset may he be permitted to observe that he has never been able to feel sympathy with any writers (let their tenets be what they may)

* The correctness of the popular tale about Omar is questioned by Gibbon.—*Decl. and Fall*, chap. li.

who, forgetting for the time at least the pursuit of pure truth, throw out an argument or raise an objection, in the cogency of which, it is evident, they do not themselves believe. Such hired advocacy taints even the good cause relatively to the man who notes the dishonesty, and who is himself in earnest about the truth. On the other hand, it is quite possible, one must feel, nay, almost unavoidable, to be drawn in admiration and regard towards each unknown inquirer (however much his conclusions may differ from one's own), who in evident good faith and simple honesty of mind is toiling onward in quest of a creed, and who exhibits, in his utterances given to the world, his genuine self, and his highest aspirations. But these few words may suffice by way of introduction. Let me, assuming here my proper personality, proceed to open my proposed subject; in other words, let me, in a somewhat informal manner, try to convey to others some of the impressions left on my mind by the various phases of religious thought which have been successively brought under its notice. And in order that a commencement may be made in a convenient mode by presenting the most complete

antithesis to Evangelicalism, with the mention of which I started, let me proceed to speak first of the speculative system of the Atheist.

ATHEISM

TILL within a recent period the word Atheism carried with it to the ears of almost all Englishmen, as it did no less to the ears of the old Greeks, an ugly sound.* It spoke of snares and stratagems, of evil deeds, and a reprobate mind. An Atheist was the most abandoned kind of heretic, in as bad odour as were, in a former age, the notorious professors of the Gnostic Creed; from one of whom the last surviving Apostle, according to ancient story the very type and embodiment of gentleness, is credibly reported to have shrunk with trepidation, as dreading the fall of the building which enclosed them together. But the Creed of Negation, if it may be so termed without offence, is now somewhat less under the ban of the sentiments and the tongues of our fellow-countrymen. Whether this be right

* Not a few noted men were banished from ancient Athens on the charge of Atheism.

and sensible or the reverse, an enlightened tolerance or a sign of religious decline, is not now purposed to be made a question. The fact itself is simply stated here. It may be that disbelievers themselves have, in some respects, changed, and are no longer strict representatives of the old type of infidelity: or it may be that their opponents have insensibly modified the once prevalent opinion about heterodoxy. At all events, many of those to whom the term Atheist is popularly applied, and who probably may not resent its application to themselves, assert temperately and calmly that the word, taken in its strict sense, implies not a positive denial of the existence of a God, but a mere absence of belief in God as existing and acting—an attitude of mind poised between belief and total unbelief, which maintained, arguments *pro* and arguments *con* are weighed with equal fairness by the dispassionate thinker, and no certain preponderance of the one or the other is deemed to be established. A right-minded Atheist is no scoffer, we are told; he upholds morality and the social virtues; he is a lover of his kind; he by no means despises the Theist or the Christian,

although he believes them both to be the votaries of a delusive faith. In fact, the modern thoughtful Atheist may, perhaps, be better termed the sceptic. He does not take upon himself to condemn positively this or that belief: his principle for himself and for others is—"Prove all things." Personally, he can only receive as matters of belief the demonstrations of reason and the deductions of experience; he can only allow the conclusions of others to be verities, provided they admit of such proof as he can deem conclusive.

We shall look far before we discover another representative of this school of thought so gifted by nature, so accomplished, so fair, and at the same time so uncompromising and rigorously logical as was the late Mr. Mill. He was prepared to go in the direction of belief in a Supreme Being so far as, and no further than, proofs of a mathematical certainty extended. In the matter of forming a positive creed, he allowed nothing of the nature of a moral presumption to sway his convictions. Of course he allowed a force to a strong moral presumption; but to him this kind of foundation for belief never took

the place of proof. Till irrefragable proof was adduced in favour of any point sought to be established, about that point there must be in the mind of a wise man (so this great teacher held) suspension of judgment. In this spirit the preliminary proposition concerning the existence of a God was argued out. What was to be said from the grounds of pure reason was calmly and impartially considered: evidence was evoked from this and that quarter, but the sum of the favourable testimony of such evidence as could be produced falls short, it was affirmed, of anything like demonstration. Probability of a high order *was* established: marks of design in nature show that it is far more likely than not that a Being benevolent and powerful exists (not all-powerful, however, or, if omnipotent, then not purely and simply benevolent); but at the same time the existence of such a Being cannot be rightly called knowable, so as to justify the positive affirmation of belief in Him.

The scepticism of Mr. Mill did not, so far as the present writer's knowledge of his opinions extends, lead him at any time to admit as a possibility the hypothesis of a Something between proper per-

sonal Deity and No-God—an impersonal Divine existence, a Spirit pervading all nature. His robust mind and clear insight rejected all such shadowy imaginings and abstractions. He questioned, indeed, on the score of insufficient evidence, whether there be a God, Maker and Lord of the universe: but anything short of such a Being, an impersonal Divinity would have been to his mind no God at all. It would have been simply a Power, or Law of nature, no more God than Force or Matter. Mr. Mill's power of analysis and cautious method of proceeding inductively to generalisations, could never have permitted him to mix up together, as identical or homogeneous entities, the abstractions generated by the human mind, and the actual world of existence which is extraneous to it, or to suppose that from the one could be deduced the facts of the other. Indeed, had it not been for an evident leaning on his part towards Theism, which, however, he never himself designated or reckoned a positive belief, we should have had to consider Materialism the actual basis of Mr. Mill's speculative philosophy. But if Materialist he be termed by any,

as having persistently refrained from asserting the existence of any Causality higher than Matter or Force, we must be permitted to remind such persons that he freely conceded the possibility of there being a Supreme and Creative Intelligence.

In considering the great question of Religion, Mr. Mill sets on foot the inquiry as to whether any kind of supernatural religion has ever been given to men *ab extra*, or whether what goes by the name of religion is not in every instance simply that which man has reasoned out for himself. In pursuing this inquiry the question is raised respecting the actual existence of a living and acting God, as about a matter admitting of doubt. But no hint is dropped, no conception is invited to be formed, of the possibility of there being existent an Influence other than the Creator, which may be called God. However, our great logician leaves us with the enormously important question undetermined, so far at least as certainty is concerned—is there, or is there not, a God? Reason and experience, he lets us know, cannot give a definite solution even to it; much less, then, can they be ex-

pected to set at rest satisfactorily the many subsidiary but still very momentous questions which must arise upon the establishment or concession of the fundamental proposition that a Supreme Being exists. He thinks it, indeed, by no means unprofitable for men to exercise their faculty of imagination, and to picture to themselves a God, and to invest Him with all conceivable excellencies: nay, if they find it in them to dream of a heaven, and to idealise the hopes of the Christian faith, this *may* do good, and can do no harm: at the same time it behoves such theorists, when they raise the pleasant edifices of their fantasy, to bear in mind that they are building on an uncertain foundation. With no more definite conclusion, then, than this, we are left by certainly one of the ablest and most noble-hearted of the professors of scepticism. There may be a God; it is even likely that there is a God; but we can never know the certainty of His existence: of course, therefore, we can never be said to know God.*

* Mr. Mill's own words towards the end of his last work in the summing up of his foregoing arguments are these: "The rational attitude of a thinking mind towards the

Against so dreary a conclusion of the clear, unimpassioned reasonings which were presented to us by Mr. Mill, the hearts of most men revolt. And thus on the extinction of the life of this lamented philosopher, we find a wail raised over his utterances (the most important of which, regarded from a religious point of view, came to us as posthumous) by those who denied the authority of revelation, as well as by such as accepted it. It was felt and said that our moral convictions, based on variously derived considerations, are too strong to allow us to rest in mere negations, assured, though we might be, by the subtlest master of reasoning, that we could not legitimately go further. It was an almost universal persuasion (except, of course, among pro-

supernatural, whether in natural or revealed religion, is that of scepticism. There is evidence, but insufficient for proof, and amounting only to one of the lowest degrees of probability. The indications given by such evidence as there is, point to the creation, not indeed of the universe, but of the present order of it by an Intelligent Mind, whose power over the materials was not absolute, whose love for His creatures was not His sole actuating inducement, but who, nevertheless, desired their good. The notion of a providential government by an omnipotent Being for the good of His creatures must be entirely dismissed."

fessed Atheists) that it is not simply a blind hope which makes us in our minds bridge over the chasm yawning between Mr. Mill's logically strong probability in favour of the existence of God and the felt moral certitude of both His existence and of the attributes commonly assigned to Him.

Indeed, to a man seeking a creed, and indocinated from his earliest years with a belief in a Supreme Being, concerning whom he wants to be taught more perfectly, a system of pure scepticism must fail to commend itself. Certain primary truths, or fancied truths, *are* truths to him; and if he is told by one, supposed to be qualified to speak, that they cannot be proved, but must ever remain doubtful, or probable, at the best, he feels himself obliged to postulate them, and then to see whether he cannot establish them to his own mind as certainties by the force of independent and collateral considerations. In fact, a system of negation can, speaking generally, satisfy only a man who approaches the question of religion as he would a chess problem. He to whom religion is already a life, cannot give up his primary moral convictions, unless these are positively proved to him to be false; and to do this

is not the *rôle* of the sceptic. This latter will tell him, indeed, that he cannot be certain that his opinions are true ; to which he will reply that at least he can give reasons for his belief: and should he fail to demonstrate their validity, and only succeed in adducing probable grounds for his convictions, there will be an equal failure on the other side to prove absolutely the falseness of what he propounds.

It may be well to notice here that the assertion of the lack of demonstrative proof concerning the existence of a God is by no means confined to sceptical thinkers. Writers of all shades of Theistical belief, including the most orthodox of the Christian body, have confessed that it is not a strictly demonstrable matter; though, unlike the Sceptical school, they have considered that God's existence and attributes are made evident to man by virtue of reasons the cogency of which is fully sufficient to satisfy his mind. They would then argue that the assumption once made of the being of a God, overwhelming evidence, derived partly from a review of man's own moral and intellectual nature, and given partly by the facts of the

general world of outward nature, confirms the mind's conviction of the truth of the assumption. They would also show the glaring absurdities which would follow upon the contrary supposition of there being no God, taken in connection with the patent fact of the existence of human intelligence and of an order in nature.

They would ask, "Must we not part with reason before we can hold that unconsciousness may have originated consciousness; fixity of nature, freedom of will; a purposeless blending together of atoms, or a succession of lucky chances, the order of the universe?"

Now, it is evident that the advocate of positive Atheism can have no legitimate and close-handed contest with the defender of Revelation, as such, because there exists no proper point in a pathway of convictions common to both, at which, having arrived together so far, they may join issue: rather, it is on the wider field of philosophy that the direct issue must be joined between those who doubt the existence of God and those who affirm His existence. In regard to Mr. Mill, who professedly places himself between Atheism proper and Belief, and in his heart inclines clearly to

the latter, we have to observe that in speaking of religion, although he necessarily notices the subject of revelation, he enters into no very lengthened disquisition about it, but contents himself with arraying against Revelation in the abstract certain formidable *à priori* objections, and there cursorily commenting upon the deficiency of evidence for any particular alleged revelation, and notably for the Christian. The practical conclusion presented to us seems to be this, Probably there is a God ; and if God exists, it is quite within the limits of possibility that He might vouchsafe His reasonable creatures a revelation : at the same time it is more likely than unlikely that no revelation should be given, and it is nearly certain that no revelation has been given to men. Still the negative is not proved. Now, as the present end I propose to myself is of a practical character, and as it seems very far from likely that seekers after a creed will be often attracted to the cold, cheerless doctrines of philosophical scepticism, I shall leave here the consideration of it with the single remark that if any one was ever fitted to recommend to men's acceptance a system repugnant to their

common moral instincts, such as I am forced to consider scepticism to be, that man was the late lucid writer and high-minded philosopher, Mr. Mill.

MATERIALISM

BUT it must not be forgotten [that speculative 2
Atheism or a philosophising scepticism is only one form of Atheism. To it properly belongs the term I have employed already, "the Creed of Negation." Now there is also its caricature—unphilosophical and positive Atheism. While scepticism, as professed by thoughtful students of nature and of human experience, pauses, doubts, and investigates this opinionative form of unbelief, Atheism pure and simple pronounces vociferously its dictum, that God there is not, must not be. Matter there is, as all know: but who has ever penetrated beyond matter and the region of the senses? So let matter be constituted the boundary of existences and realities. We know not of a God: a God there cannot be. Thus speaks out positive Atheism, whether under the name of Materialism, Naturalism, Positivism, or other denomination known to the initiated: thus it speaks

out boldly, but it may be not altogether wisely. For even were there a lack of positive reasons to be rendered for the contrary belief, it could scarcely be wise for creatures of a limited capacity and of restricted opportunities of observation to affirm the impossibility of any existence beyond the cognisance of their senses. It may at least be safely asserted that the distinction ordinarily made between mind and matter cannot be disproved or shown to be arbitrary and groundless. As, then, no absurdity is involved in seeking the origin of man's mind in something distinct in its nature from matter, but, on the contrary, mental phenomena appear to encourage a search after an immaterial source, the possibility of an intelligence either prior to matter, or coeval with it, source of finite human mind, cannot be excluded. With honest and modest doubts it is possible to sympathise; but baseless assertions that man's intelligence is capable of positively disproving the existence of a Supreme Intelligence, simply offend and alienate the candid inquirer. Being in quest of a Creed, he passes on. Nor does he pass on without the acknowledgment of considerable obligation to Mr. Mill for having made apparent the futility of

positive affirmations as to the non-existence of a personal God, by his powerful advocacy of the position that, although Nature may fall short of proving God's existence, yet it affords us at least a high degree of probability in favour of His existence.

Still, it is not to be denied that there is a class of **Materialists** who, avoiding extreme positiveness of assertion, cautiously advance the proposition that matter, the only cognisable substance, appears to be also the only substance in existence. Deep have been, it is stated, the researches of certain investigators into the arcana of nature ; and they report that they have met with nothing to overthrow the opinion that mind is the product of complex modifications of matter, or of the contact of certain material forces ; nor have they been able to discover any trace of the presence of an organising Intelligence. Now, let only the dualism between Mind, *as known to us*, and Matter be disposed of, and an identity of nature be established between them—and we part incontestably with one great class of evidence in favour of the existence of a *Supreme* Mind. On the other hand, let this dualism be conclusively sustained, and

material Atheism loses the chief support of its theory. But now, if anything in the whole region of thought is self-evidencing, such certainly would have appeared to be (had we not been told the contrary by men of ability) the fact of the human spirit vindicating for itself, in virtue of its consciousness, as a claim beyond dispute, a distinct nature from the mind's environment of matter. We naturally say, "We know we *cannot* be a mere congeries of matter: thought, affection, conscience, cannot be matter: allied to certain developments of matter our mind may be by a tie of interdependence, but its essence is of a wholly different nature."* And calm reflection appears to corroborate what we seem to know by intui-

* Thus Cicero speaks: "Quæ est ei [videlicet animo] natura? Propria puto, et sua. In animi autem cognitione dubitare non possumus, nisi plane in physicis plumbei sumus, quin nihil sit animis admixtum, nihil concretum, nihil copulatum, nihil coagmentatum, nihil duplex." Aristotle held that the soul, *i.e.*, principle of life, could not exist without the body, but was no kind of body; it used the body as its instrument: the pure intellect, he conceived, might exist without a bodily organism. Plato insisted on the indivisibility of the soul, which proved it to be of a nature different from that of corporeal and perishable things: the existence of soul was prior to that of body.

tion and feeling. For even supposing (a most improbable supposition) that separate thoughts are the simple result of the activity of the material tissue of the brain, set in motion by some outward impression received, and then conveyed to the centre, by the nervous system, still that permanently regulative power of inner reflection, by which we refer to our very self the various conclusions of our judgment, cannot, so far as we are able to see, be assigned with any approach to correctness of view to mere cerebral organisation, as to its true seat and home. Further, as to such thoughts as have no apparent connexion with outward impressions—thoughts generated altogether from within, the free play of the imagination—how can these possibly have a corporeal origin, or be indebted to any suggestion or impetus from the senses? For such free exercise of thought the aid of the brain is needed, no doubt; but were we able to trace microscopically each slightest pulsation of the brain nerves, we should not for all our scrutiny be any nearer the real seat of thought. Again, our consciousness of personality asserts most emphatically that the “individual I” is not

a product, or a succession of movements, of matter.

Then, too, could any reason be rendered for the absence in animals of our mental, moral, and spiritual processes, if these arose simply from the excitation of the functions of the brain, evoked, as may be suggested, by the action of the nerves on the sensorium? The higher order of animals have much in common with ourselves. Why should they be incapable of sharing our moral and religious disposition, if mind were matter, and not a mysterious substance or entity of a nature wholly different? The differentiating cause which divides us from the brutes is, we apprehend, not the *organ* of mental impressions and action, but the hidden nature of the mind itself. It has been well said, "the greater the number of organic similarities which are discovered between man and beast, the more evident is the different nature of the treasure which God has implanted in us." The acutest physiologists acknowledge that they can discern no proper connexion between the activity of the brain and thought. That the latter depends in some way upon the former is certain; but nature

affords no hint of the manner in which the material instrument assists in giving birth to mental productions. The real agent is the mind, the man's own self, ministered to by instruments supplied by the non-spiritual organisation. We cannot conceive of the mind as a subtle ether or electrical force: we are conscious of a difference of nature between the mind and its surroundings beyond the power of words to express adequately: we can but say, "this is spirit; to all appearance immaterial."

Further, even the phenomenon of life in all its forms presents a very serious difficulty to the materialist. Can life, let us say, in its most elementary form, be thought to proceed from matter? It is well known that no kind of living organism can be produced by any mixture of inorganic substances, nor do physicists know anything of a spontaneous generation of a living thing. But if matter be the only substance or entity, why should not such results come about by virtue of the forces of inorganic nature?

It must be conceded that if mind or conscious spirit be, as it certainly seems to be, an essence distinct from matter, Atheism has indeed a slender

basis of possibility for its theory. For granted the existence of spirit as distinct from matter, then the question of the origin of spirit at once arises. Could inert matter have generated spirit? Or is spirit impersonal and eternal? Or rather, is its origin to be looked for in a Supreme Intelligence, a Father of Spirits? And then to that same origin may not the principle of all life, whether vegetative, sensational, mental, emotional, or moral, be rationally referred? It is not too much to say that the very key of the position occupied by Atheistical philosophy will be found to be constituted by the identification of the respective natures of Mind and Matter: that key taken by the demonstration of the utter unsoundness of the theory respecting Mind, the system must perforce yield up such defences of reason as it may have seemed to possess.

Let us here consult the teachings of the nature common to us all. The elementary facts of human nature, as on the one side they proclaim the independence of Mind and its distinctness from surrounding Matter, so on the other seem to declare the existence of a power outside and beyond man, between which and the human spirit

a consciousness of relation not obscurely asserts itself on our side. Thus the consciousness which assures us of our own personality and of its limited nature, induces, apparently, by the free action of the powers of thought, the conception of a personality of an unbounded nature, the root of our own being. We think of our own Mind and its limited powers, and then conceive of a Mind which embraces all cognitions, of an absolute Will the determinations of which always fulfil themselves. If such a Mind exist, it must be God. Again, our moral nature teaches us the words "I must." We spontaneously acknowledge the feeling of obligation, and that even at the very time when our will is practically ignoring its authority. But then, towards whom or what is this feeling directed? Not, surely, towards any lifeless abstraction, but towards some living power or some Being with whom we feel we have to do.* Moral law is clearly not the same as natural

* Indeed, Strauss tells us that we may and ought to exercise the feelings of trust, gratitude, submission, and piety towards the universe or cosmos, which is defined to be the one essence of forces and laws which manifest and fulfil themselves. But we answer that the moral nature of most men

law. It seems, however, to be equally imposed upon us from without, viz., by a Will whose right over us we never dispute. Of course, when we have studied philosophy, we are able to reason away such primary instincts: but, nevertheless, they appear to be outline-teachings of our nature, and to have their real character vindicated by the practical embrace of them by an overwhelming majority of the thinking portion of our species. Should it be contended that we have no right to assign a strictly axiomatic character to these conclusions, at all events no one can deny that when they are placed before an unsophisticated mind an assent is freely given to them.

I refrain from doing more than hinting at the obvious objection lying against all forms of Atheism in the felt necessity for an originating Self-existent Cause of the universe. When we speak of the Laws of Nature's working, we are conscious that

does not enable them to exercise such feelings towards a dead thing: we can only, for instance, be grateful to a person. By a perversion of the moral sentiment, indeed, there can be, in the case of the ignorant, a species of transfer to inanimate objects of that which does not legitimately belong to them. Thus Xerxes was angry with the Hellespont, punished it with lashes, and made it a present of a pair of fetters.

the expression simply denotes the observed fixity of a relation between various material forces or bodies, according to which the same effect follows invariably the same cause, or the same consequent attends upon the same antecedent. Such laws we understand to be no proper originating Cause of existence or of action in the Universe: the conception is still imperatively demanded of an actual, eternal Substance or Intelligence, spring of all causality, itself uncaused. Whether such primal Cause be a conscious or unconscious power, the general sense of mankind, on a survey of the apparent numberless marks of design in the universe, is not slow to determine. It demands, and will ever demand, as the only solution of the problem which is not cumbered with endless absurdities, an Intelligent Agent and Framer.

PANTHEISM

As respects Pantheism, I have but a few remarks to offer; not, indeed, as being unmindful of the imposing figure it makes as a system, whether regarded on the side of the numerical strength of such as adopt it either professedly or apparently, or in relation to the powerful intellects of not a few

of its adherents, but as compelled to view it, possibly through some mental defect of my own, in much the same light as Polytheism or the Gnostic emanation of æons, viz., as a system so inherently opposed to first principles of reason and the constraints of conscience, so palpably the offspring of the imagination, and so arbitrarily and poetically projected from a shadowy basis, that it has ever failed to raise in my mind even a momentary suspicion that it might be the way of truth, which I want to know. The hypothesis of a God who is not separate from nature and acts not upon nature from without,* being, so to speak, the soul of nature, which is an emanation from Him; a God with no proper Personality and no proper Will—this hypothesis or theory may possibly give satisfaction to minds of a speculative turn, but affords me individually no single conception which I am able to rest upon or make my own. At the same time it is impossible, of course, to deny that one or another form of Pantheism has, in various ages, both in the East and West, thrown

* "The intramundane, and not the supramundane cause of all things," according to the language of an accurate definition.

its spell over some of the subtlest intellects that ever existed: and it is well known that one of the ablest professors of the belief has elaborated a speculative system which is a marvel of ingenuity and of close reasoning.* However, if the primary assumption respecting the nature of being is radically defective, of what value is the most elaborate superstructure based upon this insecure foundation? And in the case of Pantheism this assumption appears to be no less arbitrary than improbable. What can we find satisfactory in a system of teaching which demands, as its starting-point, the axiom that "Man is the measure of the universe;" and is able, consequently, to construct an absolutely exhaustive ontological scheme by virtue simply of

* It may therefore be objected that even supposing the Pantheistic systems of the East to be the production of the unbalanced imagination, yet at least Spinoza's deductive system is one of pure reasoning, and that of the highest and most conclusive kind. But even Spinoza makes the mental image the basis of actual existence, and deduces all modes and phenomena of being from the laws of thought. Therefore, practically, with him, what the mind thinks, is. He assumes the existence of a universal substance, which includes in it all existence whatsoever, and which, in fact, is God. This conception of the universal is made the ground-work of real universal subsistence.

the laws of thought ; and which, in pursuing its chain of deductions, the propositions of which are derived from subjective data, brings us to the grand conclusion that what may be called God is simple, impersonal existence, branching out into all separate developments of being, so that all things are God ? Again, what shall we think of a system which, in the example of its ablest expounder, "depends on the postulate that the logical form of the notion and its attributes is identical with the objective form of real existence" ? Or are we helped forward in our search after truth when we are told that what is called God is the "Absolute Idea ;" and is possessed of neither self-consciousness nor personality ; that It or He emerges into existence as distinct from the "Idea," and thus becomes nature : that man, part of nature, has personality (but not self-determination nor free-will), although proceeding from an impersonal principle ? Why personality, which seems to constitute excellence, should be denied to the highest principle, and given to a mere emanation (man), it is difficult to imagine. Our own personal consciousness, if left to itself, appears to force us to conceive of the Perfect One, or

"Infinite Principle," that He possesses personality. In fact, man cannot rid himself, save by sophistry, of the thought of God. Even the heathen Cicero can say, "Thou seest not God, and yet thou knowest Him from His works."* If we bring in here the thought of our moral nature and conscience, or religious consciousness, we again see that the Pantheistic theory involves a conflict with our most deeply rooted convictions. We all confess to the feeling of personal responsibility: we all find within us an echo to the voice of duty: we all look out of ourselves upwards. But (as has been asked before) to what do we feel we owe homage? Not, surely, to an impersonal influence; but to a Being who knows, and wills, and acts.

There can be little doubt that, portentous as may appear to be the Creeds which we name respectively Materialistic and Pantheistic, when viewed in their crudity, their axioms are, in effect, the sole basis of the belief of very many minds at the present day. Those who deny commonly received tenets, content themselves for the

* "Deum nō vides, tamen deum agnoscis ex operibus ejus."
—*Tuscul. Quæst.* i. 29.

most part with negative conclusions, and keep out of sight the legitimate end of their reasonings. But if the modern race of English doubters would enter upon a strict analysis of their own religious opinions, and push their researches to actual first principles, a large number would find that their doubts and denials, logically followed out, would land them in the regions here indicated. Moreover, the present practical effect of occupying this kind of negative standing-point is to rob the soul of the feeling of a present God.

THEISM

I now pass from this system of speculative philosophy and of intangible abstractions, which, remarkably developed as it has been, possesses for me at least no vital interest, to that phase of religious opinion which has claims to be considered the proper direct antagonist of the Christian form of belief—the one upholding a religion of nature or reason, the other a supernatural religion. The Theist, seeking to establish his system of divinity and of morals on the reasonings of the human intellect, without looking for any extraneous aid, assumes, as a first principle, the existence of one

supreme God. He then deduces by the light of reason such corollaries touching belief and duty as may seem to arise from the fundamental conclusion that God is. Firmly holding the belief of God's goodness, power, and wisdom, he sees at the same time no reason for thinking that the Deity has ever been pleased to make a distinct revelation of Himself, apart from that light which is acknowledged to reside in ordinary human faculties. The Theist therefore joins issue with the Atheist and the Sceptic, on the ground of belief in the existence of a Personal God, whilst he is in direct conflict with the Christian on the subject of a Divine Revelation.

We notice here a change of name, and a corresponding change in the general estimation of that which is denoted by the name. Theists used to be Deists, but now the ancient term appears to have become well-nigh obsolete. Why the Greek synonym should have come to be preferred to the Latin, it is not easy, at first, to see. The conjecture may be hazarded, however, that simultaneously with the rise of a greater tolerance, on the part of the British Christian public, towards the holders of opinions formerly called Deistical,

a new designation was adopted, which might make, to some extent, a severance in men's minds between old associations and the modern advance of thought upon the former lines. Whether, again, "Theist" is now made a more comprehensive term than "Deist" used to be, is not quite easy to determine. At all events, it is a very wide term at the present day. There are Theists of every shade of opinion, as there are Christians. There is even an important section of such as bow to the authority of Revelation, who would probably not repudiate the designation of Theism as applied to their system of belief. However, the ordinary Theist, while he speaks with admiration of the volume containing the alleged Revelation as a whole, pays it a deference no greater in kind than he accords to other compositions of acknowledged moral excellence.

Again, Theists there are, who, occupying pretty nearly the standing ground of the old Deists, maintain, indeed, the theory of a Personal God, but at the same time practically deny His Fatherhood, by repudiating the notion of a continually active Providence, and substituting instead the thought of an immanent principle of self-evolution as im-

planted in nature, and of a fixed system of moral order as influencing human action. But, probably, the ordinary phase of Theism, at least in modern England, is that which, in some degree, recognises a Divine interposition in the affairs of men, and in the ordering of the world of nature.

To that vast number of educated persons to whom belief in an infinite Intelligence is a part of their very life, and the mainspring of their more serious actions, the conflict now being maintained, and likely long to be maintained, between impugners and defenders of Supernatural Religion, must present features of interest far greater than any other controversy can supply. For certainly to one party—probably we may say it of each—it is a contest *pro aris et focis*: it touches the foundation on which the spiritual edifice of hope, faith and practice is built up. Both parties acknowledge one God of infinite Perfections: but whether that God has spoken openly is a point they are not agreed upon. Thus to both an overwhelming interest ought naturally to attach to the question,—“Is a certain voice, professing to be God’s, His actual voice or not?” It will be immediately seen that under the main

question are to be found ranged other questions of the gravest importance. For instance, should the fact of a Divine utterance be established, there will start up at once an inquiry as to the precise meaning of the speech. We come here to conflicting interpretations. And, among other phenomena, this singular fact meets us,—viz., that an influential section of believers in a Revelation, that is, in the Christian Revelation, depart so widely in their opinions from the generally-received Christian creed, by the elimination of certain mysterious doctrines, that their standard of belief practically assumes, or closely approximates to, the character of a Theistical creed, sanctioned, indeed, in some indeterminate way, by a presumed Divine authorisation. Interesting, however, as such less cardinal questions may be to the professor of a Revealed Religion, they must yield, in point of importance, to the still wider question spoken of above, which, in effect, forms the line of demarcation between the two great divisions of believers in a living Personal God. Indeed, this constitutes the problem which thousands of us, standing, whether on this side or on that, have a common longing to see solved.

Instead, then, of attempting to examine in detail the various shades of religious opinion which characterise the several schools of the great Theistic body, let us apply ourselves, at this point, to the calm investigation of what may be advanced either against or in favour of the pretensions of Revealed Religion. The simple question connected with this inquiry, which has a special interest for us, is, I assume, that which naturally shapes itself in this form,—Does the Christian Bible contain an authoritative and Divine revelation? For such collateral questions as may be raised (if people like it,) about other supposed revelations professing equally to have come from heaven, if raised here, would have the effect of dissipating our attention, and diverting it from our more immediate subject. Nor is it my purpose to enter, either at the present point, or at all indeed, into the controversy maintained between differing bodies of Christians respecting the right interpretation of the documents on which they all in common base their belief. As to this last question, I would merely observe that it is generally acknowledged by the opponents of the Christian scheme, that the creeds subscribed to by the large majority in the Christian

Church are in substantial agreement with the writings whence they profess to be derived ; and, consequently, if the Bible is to be received in its integrity as of Divine origin, they must needs be allowed to be correct as to their leading features. In other words, Theists do not, for the most part, dispute the popular interpretation of the Scriptures. It is the authenticity, genuineness, and exact truthfulness of the books of the Bible themselves which they call in question. Thus the essential distinction between Theistical opinions and those of the Christian hinges upon the view taken of the real nature of the alleged Revelation set forth in the Scriptures. Let us lay down, therefore, the fundamental position of Christianity, and endeavour to ascertain whether or not it is tenable.

CHRISTIANITY

THE position which is assumed for Christianity by its professors may be briefly stated as presenting these salient features (as its *differentia*, so to speak,)—viz., that God has given to man a direct Revelation of Himself and His will ; that the mission of Christ represents the chief portion and

sum of this Revelation ; and that the full Revelation itself, so far as words can set it forth, is contained in a perfectly veritable and grammatical form in the Bible. It seems superfluous to describe more fully the recognised tenets of Christianity, because, on both sides, they are allowed to be the contents of that collection of writings which the Christian believer proclaims to be authoritative. It will be quite sufficient for the purpose contemplated in these pages to examine whether the main position claimed by the believer in the Christian scheme can be maintained or not ; in other words, whether we have in the Bible a supernatural revelation. It is evident to every one that, as the Christian Faith is not simply a collection of propositions of a moral or spiritual nature, but is based on alleged facts, and, indeed, makes certain of these facts a great part of the substance of its symbols, if what is presented as fact can be disproved, the scheme itself will not be able to make good its standing ; or even if any grave doubts can be thrown upon the trustworthiness of its facts, in like proportion uncertainty must prevail as to the claim the form of faith has upon the acceptance of men. Now,

if any one specially distinctive feature marks the alleged facts of Christianity, this characteristic, it is well known, is that of their being professedly miraculous. And, further, these miracles, or, at least, a large class of them, are held by Christians to afford one principal kind of evidence in favour of the credibility of their faith. The subject of miracles, therefore, will ever form one chief battle-field for the conflict between the impugner and defender of Christianity.

MIRACLES

MUCH has been said about the proper definition of Miracles. Fortunately, as respects this subject, "the air has been cleared" in a great measure, and we no longer meet with the vague description which once satisfied theologians, including even the great Augustine,—viz., that a Miracle may be defined as "that which strikes the wondering beholder as stupendous, and beyond alike his power, experience, and expectation."* For all practical purposes, it may be enough to describe a Miracle as an interference on the part of God

* Quidquid arduum aut insolitum supra spem vel facultatem mirantis apparet.

with the ordinary working of nature: to which brief account may be added that, in cases where the nature of the miraculous occurrence permits it to be witnessed, in order to fulfil the conditions of a miracle it must be manifested to the senses of men as a palpable interruption of the known course of natural laws. I am aware that exception may be taken to the terms of this definition, as not being sufficiently distinct, for it may be asked, "May not miracles be performed, or, at least, be alleged to be performed, by other agents than God?" and again, "Does not the Christian belief endorse, as indisputable truth, the report of certain miraculous interferences with nature, which from their character could not, and, as a fact, did not, appeal to the senses of men?" Still, for the purpose of a practical test, the simple definition given above may probably be deemed sufficient. And the qualifying clause appended to it is intended to give prominence to the fact that there is a class of alleged miracles, which are not self-evidencing, but demand themselves for their establishment some independent attestation. To enter into the question of the possibility of demoniacal miracles, or, in fact, to canvass the reality of

any other reputed miracles save those described in the scriptural record, would be a running away from the point at issue. These may or may not have been false miracles, or miracles performed by Evil Spirits; but our question is,—“Are the Bible Miracles, and, notably, the Miracles of the Gospel narrative, true or false?”*

* At the same time it must be freely confessed that the vast number of miraculous events said to have taken place in various ages, of which the authenticity of the great majority would now find favour with very few, complicates the question of the Gospel Miracles. No doubt there is a natural tendency in the human mind to seek the marvellous, so that miracles would inevitably have been invented, either intentionally or through unintentional deception, independently of the performance of true miracles. However, the reality of miracles is not actually touched by the abundance of fictitious claims made for events to a miraculous character, although an adverse prejudice is naturally created by it. The only fair deduction to be drawn from the recognised love of our species for the marvellous, is that miracles ought not to be received except on very good evidence. To argue, on the other hand, that the prevalence of belief in miracles hypothetically false is a presumption in favour of true miracles (on the principle that what is genuine leads to imitation), is manifestly absurd. The Christian cannot deny that Revelation itself gives direct countenance to the notion that Evil Spirits are, on occasions, and under limitations imposed by the Almighty, able to display in the sight of men a more

Let us endeavour to decide, first, whether a Miracle, or Divine act of interference with the ordinary working of nature, can be conceived as possible, and, if thought possible, whether such act is under any circumstances credible.

Modern reasonings have done much to dissipate the mist which once hung round the subject of Miracles as argued on *a priori* grounds. Their abstract possibility is now seen to depend on the prior possibility of there being an acting Intelligence apart from and independent of the universe. Granted a Personal God, of either supreme or vast power, it must follow that as *ex vi termini* He *can*, so if it please Him, He possibly *may*, interfere with the ordinary laws of nature. The positive impossibility of Miracles can only be consistently held together with disbelief in the existence of a God possessed of power and will. Thus the Theist and the Christian, however much they may differ as to the antecedent incredibility

than superhuman power—in fact, to work miracles. He who believes in Divine miracles, feels a persuasion that a sufficient test would always be at hand to enable him to distinguish between Divinely-wrought miracles and Satanic: he who believes in no kind of miracle needs evidently no such test.

of miraculous occurrences, are yet at one in respect of their abstract possibility. Here, at least, they make common cause against the negative assertions of Materialism and Pantheism. The belief of each provides an efficient cause of Miracles. Just as it is according to the law of man's nature, that he writes a poem, or makes, if he wills it, a Thames tunnel (interfering, in the latter instance, to some extent with the laws of inorganic nature), so the working of miracles cannot, in any way, be conceived to be contrary to the law of the Divine nature, but would be in strict accordance with it. Such, at least, must be the conviction of the believer in a God who wills and acts. Given the problem of a Miracle, he at once engages to find a suitable Agent for its performance.

But although Miracles must be allowed to be possible on the assumption of the existence of a God, it does not necessarily follow, from the bare possibility, that they are probable, or even credible. Indeed, the very notion of a Miracle implies that it is contrary to general, almost to universal, experience. A presumption, therefore, lies against the credibility of an alleged Miracle. No presumption, indeed, can be established against the

probability of Miracles considered abstractedly, since, apart from experience, we have no means of deciding either way as to the likelihood of the Creator (supposing a Creator to exist) departing from the general laws He may seem to have laid down for the government of the world. No: the whole strength of rational objections to Miracles will be found to consist in the testimony of counter human experience. The voice of the testimony of ages is to the effect that nothing disturbs the continuity of Nature's working on the same primæval lines, that God's government of the world is ever carried on according to general laws, and by the agency of second causes. Can the testimony of some few men, it is asked, not unnaturally, given, let it be, under the most favourable circumstances of moral character and of power of observation, be received for a moment, if it contradicts so well-established a dictum? And, then, it must, in fairness, be conceded to those who impugn Miracles *in toto*, that the antecedent improbability which they find in regard to them on the ground of experience, is strengthened no little by the multiplied reports of prodigies which were, at one

time, deemed miraculous, but are now allowed, by the general consent of mankind, to have been no more than extraordinary natural phenomena. If some persons have been deceived about miraculous occurrences, as all are free to confess is the case, why may not all who put themselves forward as witnesses of Miracles, have been equally deceived? In fact, the onus of making good his position clearly lies with him who alleges the occurrence of miracles, since, with the exception of the very few who vouch for their reality as having been actual eye-witnesses, human testimony is universally opposed to the supposition of their ever taking place. Thus the question of Miracles resolves itself into a simple matter of evidence. Not to travel unnecessarily beyond our proper limits, let us try to estimate exclusively the value of such testimony as is given us respecting the Gospel Miracles.

There is, however, one preliminary consideration which ought to be introduced here respecting the general subject of Miracles. Miracles are generally said, as we have seen, to contradict universal, or almost universal, experience. But is this quite a correct assertion? For if we define a Miracle to

be a Divine act of interference with the laws of nature, what must we say of the Creation of our race? Have we not in it a proof derived from experience, or at least based on scientific knowledge, that at all events at the time of its occurrence an interference with the laws of nature took place? For Science is able to demonstrate that there was a time when the human race existed not on the earth; and, therefore, unless we are prepared to believe that the formation of man, with all his powers, moral and intellectual as well as physical, was the natural and necessary outcome of forces existing already in our portion of the universe, we must see in his creation a miraculous interposition on the part of the Supreme Being. Of course this argument has no force whatever for those, who being Materialists, deem that all existences are evolved by a species of automatic action from out of the womb of Nature. But granted the assumption of God's existence (a proposition, as we have said, not strictly demonstrable, but at the same time certain with a degree of moral certainty only falling short of mathematical proof), no controversialist would, I imagine, be found prepared to dispute the position that man was brought into the world by a

purely miraculous act. Even if we concede to the new doctrine of Evolution the possibility of man's bodily frame having being derived from some previous organisation, unless we further concede the full claims of Materialism and make no distinction between Mind and Matter, we must still hold that the endowment of mental and moral faculties proceeded from a creative and miraculous act. It must, then, be allowed, when we would examine the claims of any event to be of a miraculous nature, that we are unable to deny the knowledge, or, if the word be preferred, the *persuasion*, of the reality of miraculous interference with nature's ordinary working, exercised once at, it is true (relatively to us), a remote period in the history of the world. So much, if at least we assume the existence of a Creator, we seem under the necessity of allowing.

THE GOSPEL MIRACLES

BUT now, what is the testimony which can be claimed for the Miracles of the Gospel? Is it of a nature sufficient to warrant a rational belief in them, or so defective as to compel us to set them aside; or, thirdly, can we find no balance of pro-

bability in favour of the correctness of either view? Presumably, and on the grounds of general reasoning, we have no right to expect miracles at any time: the most we can say in favour of their occurrence is that we have no good reason to think them impossible. Now, in the first place, is there any assignable cause or occasion for the Miracles we have to consider, any presumable *raison d'être* attaching to them, which may justly induce a wise man to examine gravely the question of their reality? There is. Every one, whether believer or unbeliever, is perfectly well aware that these miracles do not exhibit themselves as isolated phenomena, but are in alleged close connection with a communication from heaven. Those who receive these miracles as true, assign as the occasion of their occurrence the need of affixing a Divine stamp to a revelation given from above, for the purpose of proving its real character. Now, although this alleged revelation cannot be made use of to establish the reality of the Miracles, yet its nature is allowed generally to be so excellent and so far surpassing in moral grandeur and profundity all ordinary systems of religion, that at least an impartial hearing may well be accorded to the

Miracles which profess to speak to its Divine character. The Miracles are not simply meaningless prodigies: the account they give of themselves, when questioned, is that, being in direct relation to a message sent from above, they both accredit and illustrate that message. Further, this Revelation professes to be not simply beneficial, but absolutely necessary for securing to man the high position in the scale of being which he is capable of attaining. So that at all events a *problematical* case is made out for inducing us to think it not absolutely impossible that the guarantee of Miracles, testifying to a boon of a value altogether unique, which without such guarantee would have been inefficacious or less efficacious, should have been granted to mankind.

It has been repeatedly pointed out by those who have submitted the evidence of the Gospel Miracles to a searching investigation, that the eye-witnesses of the alleged miracles were few in number; persons, too, not distinguished for powers of perception, and though of good faith so far as can be judged, yet from their prepossessions and enthusiastic character liable to be deceived as to the reality of what they might have thought

they witnessed. Here it is certainly allowable to insist on the fact of the not unfrequent self-deception of men of apparently good faith and of fair power of forming a judgment in acknowledged cases of untrue miracles.* Then to what cross-examination, it is asked, were those obscure witnesses to the miraculous events of the Gospel ever subjected? They merely seem (it is re-

* A late writer on Supernatural Religion states that before and at the time of Christ the Jews were accustomed to witness similar alleged miracles as every-day occurrences. It is open to grave doubt whether this statement can in the remotest degree be substantiated. That the Jews of that day believed in the ever active agency both of angels and demons is an undoubted fact; and it is more than probable that they credited this agency in numberless instances with what in reality was the ordinary operation of natural laws. It is also true that they used exorcism, and believed in its virtue to expel demons. But where have we the record of miracles similar to those of Jesus being daily performed? Assuredly not in Josephus. Were the assertion of the writer correct, we could scarcely account for the evident astonishment of the spectators of the signs and wonders said to be wrought by Jesus, which elicited the cry: "It was never so seen in Israel." There is, indeed, one well-known passage in the writings of Josephus where he speaks of the working of miracles, but it is in connection with Jesus Himself, and, in consequence of its recognition of His mysterious character, is generally considered spurious.

marked) to have reported their wonderful tales to willing listeners; and as time went on they may have mixed conscientiously much that was purely imaginary with what had a foundation of fact. Nor, again, have we the personal testimony of these men. We have only the report of their testimony; and that report was, confessedly, embodied in writings many years after the supposed events took place: and great doubt hangs over the authorship of these writings, and over the circumstances under which they were put together. Further, the most learned of the Apostolic body, indeed probably the single one who was not illiterate, does not even profess to have been an eye-witness of any of the proper occurrences of the Gospel narrative, and only became a disciple after the disappearance of the Founder of the faith. Ought we, it is inquired, on such very slender evidence as we possess, to give credence to the loosely-constructed account of most stupendous miracles, and to yet far more stupendous facts which these miracles are cited to set forth and confirm? And, next, we are invited to enter into an examination of the Biblical record, to find out, as far as it is possible,

what degree of authority the several books possess, and how far trustworthy the general consensus of the whole collection of writings may be.

On this portion of the investigation very much study, it is well known, has been expended of late years ; and it is probable that the united labours of the scholars of each successive period of twenty years or so, have done for some time past, and are still doing, a good deal towards the satisfactory settlement of the great question of the actual authority of the New Testament—that something like that amount of research marks a definite stage in the successful prosecution of the work. At the present stage of the controversy between such as receive implicitly the statements of the Bible, and those who doubt or deny their truthfulness, it cannot be said that the Christian defences, assailed stoutly though they have been, are as yet shattered and taken. Clearly much more remains to be done, if the contents of the Christian Revelation are ever to be demonstrated to be mythical. At present there is an entire want of agreement among its assailants. They form an irregular band of guerilla troops, fighting without a plan, and not unfrequently fighting

against each other. Thus the cause of Theism suffers. Each writer must have a theory of his own, not being satisfied with the simple disproof of the opinions he impugns, and seems never to be better pleased than when he upsets, to his own thinking, the theory of a coadjutor: nay, probably it would not be difficult to cite instances where the same writer has supplanted a former theory of his own by an entirely different one. This tendency to constant development and novelty of view is disastrous, as creating general distrust. It is true something of the same sort is noticeable among the defenders of Revelation, as has been pertinently remarked by the able writer on Supernatural Religion referred to in a former note, who speaks of the futility of the course adopted by certain "liberal" advocates of the Christian faith, who would get rid of unnecessary Miracles (as they deem them), while compelled at the same time, by the position they occupy, to let the more important ones still stand—a mark, no less than the "suppressed" Miracles, for the shafts of the unbeliever. That any appreciable gain accrues to the Christian cause from this process of minimising its marvels is far from

evident: indeed, the reverse of gain is rather the result. Thus the evils of a divided camp are felt on both sides, but, perhaps, with preponderating force on the side of unbelievers.

But let us now see what is advanced on the part of those who maintain, with no abatement whatever, the reality of the Gospel Miracles, and the integrity of the Christian scheme as propounded in the Scriptures. First, it is vehemently maintained that a large proportion of the alleged Miracles were of that nature which precluded the possibility of unconscious deception on the part of the most simple witnesses, or, at least, rendered it highly improbable. For though there might be collusion or error in the case of certain professed instances of healing, where an enthusiast, or a designing deceiver, might seem to work miraculous cures, numerous recorded Miracles of Jesus cannot possibly admit of this explanation. Eleven or twelve "Galilean peasants" (to omit mention of other eye-witnesses), let their simplicity have been what it may, could certainly have formed a correct judgment about such matters as the giving sight to blind persons, the healing of lepers, the raising of the dead, the feeding of thousands with

a few loaves—and, above all, they could not have been mistaken as to the identity of their Master, if they thought they saw Him frequently after His so conspicuously open death. Again, as to the “getting up” of cases for the display of a pretended thaumaturgic art, no one who has the slightest appreciation of the noble simplicity of the character of Jesus, dreams of insinuating that He could have resorted to such an expedient. Neither is it at all natural to suppose that those who professedly came to be healed, feigned a disease or an ailment. Considering, then, the character of the Miracles said to be performed by Jesus, and of the alleged miraculous occurrence of His Resurrection, we could not rationally suppose that a number of persons who had been present not simply on one or two occasions of the display of Christ’s power, but who had witnessed the whole series of wonders, and thought they saw Him after He had died, could have been under a delusion in respect of these matters. That after their Master’s disappearance they should have agreed to concoct the most romantic and marvellous tales about Him, may by some persons be thought conceivable. But

then here is put forward the favourite argument of Apologists, which certainly carries weight with it, when the good faith of the Apostolic body and of those numerous individuals who were banded with them is called in question, viz., that the profession of belief in the Messiah exposed the first adherents of the faith to every species of persecution—that the disposition and temper of mind which braved all dangers are not consonant with the spirit of conscious deception, however they may assort with that of enthusiasm—that all we know of the character of the Apostolic men forbids the suspicion of their being capable of such inventions—that their Master's teaching tended to draw them altogether away from such courses—that had there been a combination among the many followers of Jesus to invent a series of brilliant actions which had no foundation in fact, the truth must have eked out at some time or other. We must, then, allow that had we the living testimony of many who declared to us that they had seen the wonders described in the Gospel narrative, and also spoke of them, too, in the artless, unimpassioned manner, which the writers

of the Gospels employ, reporting to us also words of the Worker of Miracles (such as we find in those records) in evident vital connexion with the wonders themselves, we should be compelled to acknowledge that there was certainly *some* ground for belief in the truth of the statement : were we further convinced in a mode satisfactory to ourselves of the general veracity of the witnesses, we could hardly hold out against the evidence, unless prepared to confess that our senses were no longer proper judges of what came under their cognizance. Now the most sceptical are inclined to believe that we should be competent judges of the identity of a friend whose death and burial we had witnessed, if he should afterwards appear to us and converse with us.*

* Still, not all doubters. A modern German writer says : "I should not trust my eyes if I saw a Supernatural Miracle pass before them." Whereupon another German writer remarks (though, perhaps, his inference is not quite legitimate) that then history might with equal reason be required to give up every historical proof, and even the certainty of the senses and experience. At this juncture we may be reminded of the reported saying of Jesus, that a man coming from the dead would fail to establish conviction of truth in some minds, as well as of the remarkable statement in the Fourth Gospel,

However, we are very far indeed from having the living testimony of such as have seen, or profess to have seen, the signs wrought by Jesus. All that we possess is the record of their testimony ; or rather, it is a record speaking of the signs themselves, and affirming that certain men who professed to have witnessed them, gave testimony respecting Jesus and His marvellous history. But now, what is the exact character of this record? Could we but resolve this question in a manner carrying conviction to all minds, we should then close the controversy, and might bury our weapons of war. But as a matter of fact, around this crucial question war be waged—not necessarily, however, between unfriendly combatants—for many a long year still. It were something to see an approach to a final solution of it. Let us at all events cherish the oft-quoted aspiration about truth, that it will prevail at last.

Before entering upon the grave question above indicated, let me advert to certain considerations

that when Christ restored a dead man to life, many persons, far from believing in His mission in consequence, wished to put out of the way the resuscitated man.

bearing upon the general subject of testimony in regard to Miracles as recorded in a book or books, the character of which is supposed, as yet, to be undetermined. It has been objected that whatever value might have been attached to the testimony of eye-witnesses of alleged miracles, when they were living and could be examined, to succeeding generations, at all events, the evidential value of the mere record of such Miracles is infinitesimally small, inasmuch as the men of a distant age have no power of proving the reality of the Miracles, which, in their turn, are brought forward to prove certain doctrines. But, on close examination, this objection will not be found to have the force which, at first, may seem to belong to it. For it might, in the same way, be objected to all historical facts in the past, or to all past phenomena, that, as they are simply recorded, and were not witnessed by any living persons, their reality is doubtful, and the greater the lapse of time, the denser will be the cloud of doubt enveloping them. Now, we do not usually deal so with historical records. In regard to them our aim is to ascertain their general credibility, and we are ready to believe that the eyes and mental

faculties of others in days past performed exactly the same office as ours perform now.

Then, as to the Gospel Miracles, the existence of the Christian Church affords in itself strong corroborative evidence of the value of the testimony on which it may be said with truth to have been founded. There can be no reasonable doubt at all that the men who constituted the Christian society in the first generation of its existence, received from living witnesses substantially the same testimony as is preserved to us in the records of the Church. What opportunity might have been given them of testing the evidence is, of course, for ever hidden from us: but the fact of their being persuaded by it remains; also the further fact that from age to age the Christian Church was built up by the delivery, for a long time entirely oral, of the original testimony from one man to another. We may add, too, that this result,—viz., the growth of a vast society by virtue of the prolific nature of the Apostolic testimony, cast as seed upon the soil of men's apprehensions, appears to have been exactly contemplated by the Founder of the Christian religion—a remarkable proof of prescience. Thus the phenomenon of the

continued existence of the Church, with its peculiar history, its sacred writings, its consistency of belief, is itself at least a guarantee of the remarkable character of that testimony, which overcame men's prejudices at the first, and induced them to embrace the strange belief offered them, and, then, has ever since exercised such a lasting and powerful influence. If Christianity be based on statements which are of apocryphal value, or of no value at all, then, seeing that its very essence is inseparably connected with, nay, is constituted by, certain alleged facts, it must be allowed to be an instance entirely unparalleled of a noble and world-wide success attending a positively untrue system of belief. For thus much is conceded on all hands, namely, that the practical effects of Christianity in introducing into the world an incomparable engine of civilisation, and in forming noble lives in tens of thousands of instances, entitle us to speak of its noble success.

Still, tempting though it may be to ascribe the undoubtedly good effects of the Christian Revelation to the character of its teaching, as being (hypothetically) unmixed with serious error, may not a possible alternative theory be offered to our

acceptance? As to the personal character of Jesus Himself there is very little variation in opinion at the present day: believers in His Divine mission, and unbelievers, entertain, in common, a most exalted view of its moral grandeur and loveliness.

Also, scattered throughout the Gospel narratives, we possess, it is usually acknowledged, the essential features of His teaching, mixed up, indeed, as some assert, with much which is extraneous, and, as dross, separable from the native gold. But now, let us ask, what if a halo of romance has been suffered to gather round and obscure the veritable history of Christ? May not the miraculous element be attributed to that cause, and, at the same time, may not the excellent results of the diffusion of the Christian faith be due exclusively to that large residuum of positive truth which is stored up in the pages of the New Testament, and of which the portraiture of Jesus forms the most influential constituent? For, after all, theorise as we may, what do we know about the exact testimony of the first confessors of the faith, or about the written deposit of the faith? Very conflicting are the views now taken of the several books of the New Testament, of

their respective date and authorship. The striking difference between the first three Gospels and the fourth has been made the ground, in many influential quarters, for intercalating a long period between the composition of the former (or of the rough drafts, or first outlines of the former), and the latter. It is true, there is no one undisputed theory about the date and authorship of John's Gospel among those who concur in doubting its authenticity, and, at present, the most divergent views are promulgated on the subject. I shall shortly revert to this point.

However, there is one great obstacle to our accepting the semi-mythical view I have mentioned above, and I know not how this is to be effectually removed. I refer to difficulties occasioned by the history and undoubted writings of the Apostle Paul. His recorded experience seems to be the rock against which one promising theory after another strikes, and is shattered. Thus, *e.g.*, a late writer on Supernatural Religion has shown considerable critical acumen in his investigation into the sources of the Christian belief, and has subjected to a rigorous examination both the Biblical records and the

other writings of earliest Christian antiquity; but he has not grappled with what, perhaps, is the most serious difficulty in the way of "rational Christianity," viz., that which is presented by our knowledge of the great Apostle. The difficulty is this. Of the Apostle Paul we possess a memoir of considerable detail, presented to us partly in narrative, partly in recorded speeches, and partly again in his own writings, of which the correctness of the main features cannot be disputed. From this we find that from an inveterate persecutor of the Christian society, he suddenly became an enthusiastic adherent and preacher of the faith. He himself attributes this sudden change to a vision, in which he was made to see the Divine Master whom he ever after served with all the energy of his ardent temperament, and to hear His reproaches addressed to himself. Now if any one thing more than another would have been repugnant to the mind of Saul of Tarsus, that were surely the assertion of the renewed life of Jesus of Nazareth. True, he was a Pharisee, and held the doctrine of a resurrection; but the notion of that hateful impostor (as at that time

he considered Jesus to be) being actually alive again must have been in most violent contradiction to all his preconceptions. Yet in some mode or other, in spite of the strongest prejudices, he was led to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead, and been frequently seen. Then, though he is never represented to have had much intercourse with the actual companions of the Master, yet it is perfectly certain that he had opportunities of conversing with some of the chief disciples. In fact, he says himself in a letter, the genuineness of which no one disputes, that he stayed a fortnight with one of them just three years after his conversion to the faith. And it is morally certain that one, and the principal, subject of their converse must have been the character, actions, condition, and nature of that same Jesus, to whose service he had dedicated himself. That there could not have failed to be a unity of opinion between the new disciple and the old ones on the subject of the Resurrection of Jesus, is both self-evident and shown us by direct testimony. Of Paul's opinion I shall have to speak more at length; of the opinion of the Twelve, suffice it

to say that the preaching of the Resurrection of Christ, as of a matter of which they themselves had had ocular proof, is represented in the early annals of the Church as the foremost subject of their teaching.

Nor is there the slightest reason for doubting this statement, confirmed as it is by the prominent mention of the same alleged fact in the various epistles (general or non-Pauline) of the New Testament, let whoever may have been their authors.* Of all improbable stories, that which would represent the first promulgators of the Christian doctrines as knowing nothing about, and preaching nothing about, the resurrection of their Master, is one of the wildest. We know, as well as we know anything, what Paul preached on this particular subject: and to fancy that he taught as we find him teaching after he had had personal communication with some at least of the

* Of course, if Peter wrote the First Epistle of Peter, we have direct evidence as to the nature and contents of his testimony to his Master. Those even who deny the authenticity of 1 Peter assign an early date to it, from A.D. 60 to 80. Polycarp, a hearer of John, knew the Epistle, and quotes from it (though not by name). Clement, of Rome (about A.D. 100), was acquainted with the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Twelve,* and they on the other hand had nothing to say on the topic which was so fruitful a one to him, is simply preposterous. If the learned Apostle laboured under a delusion in deeming Christ risen and seated in the heavenly places, the rest of the leaders of the Church, it is certain, laboured equally under the same false impression, and proclaimed to all the world their belief.

It is important here to recall distinctly the place which the resurrection of Christ holds in Paul's doctrinal system. Evidently it is the very keystone of his teaching; all is made to hang upon it. On Christ's resurrection is made to depend the spiritual life of believers, as well as the hope of the bodily resurrection. If Christ be not risen, he argues, all is lost. And it is to be noted that St. Paul views the rising of Christ as a fact of immeasurable moment in the domain of actuality. In speaking of the event, he clearly does not spiritualise or idealise, but in a matter-of-fact way, as though pleading in a court of justice, he enumerates the witnesses who said they had seen the risen Saviour. It is im-

* e.g., Peter, John, and James (the Lord's brother).

possible to think therefore, with an able living writer (whose explanation was given to the world a quarter of a century ago), that the Apostle in speaking of Christ's rising and present life is really meaning to say simply that God lives and must ever live. Now, St. Paul's most noted declaration of belief in the resurrection of Jesus occurs, as is well known, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians; and this happens to be one of the few epistles which even the most unsparing critics allow to be his. Indeed, although some critics insist on the spuriousness of one epistle, and others call in question the genuineness of another, yet all allow that Paul did write epistles, and that we possess at least some in their integrity. As regards the interests of our present point, it does not much matter which of the epistles are discarded by the sagacity of modern criticism, and which are retained, provided any are allowed to be Pauline, because the whole body of the writings which go by the name of Paul's epistles is completely and equally saturated with the doctrine.

But although it is impossible to mistake what Paul's conviction was, may he not have been

deceived? For he never saw Jesus before His disappearance (so far as we know), and whatever may have been the exact nature of his celebrated vision, it was very easy for his imagination at that time of excitement to frame any amount of extraordinary sights and sounds. On the other hand, however, we have to face very formidable difficulties, if we would maintain the opinion that the Apostle did indeed most distinctly believe the restoration to life of the dead Jesus, but was mistaken in his opinion. For it is clear that he spoke of the event with those who stated that they had seen and conversed with the Master after death had removed Him from them. We should gather, indeed, from his mention of "the 500" and of the survival up to a particular point of time of the majority of them, that he had access to many such eye-witnesses.* And

* It is said by Dr. Arnold, of Rugby: "I have been used for many years to study the history of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them; and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort to the understanding of a fair inquirer than the great sign which God has given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead."—*Sermons of Christian Life*—Sermon ii.

then evidently under the impression that the same Jesus who declared His Divine mission and suffered in consequence, had risen and was a living personage in an exalted state, the Apostle looked upon Him as a living Friend and Master, and professed to act as having received a commission from Him. It is a little unreasonable to affirm confidently that at the end of eighteen centuries we are in a better position for judging what was the real history of the resurrection of Jesus, than was the learned and originally unbelieving Jew, Saul, who moved in the very centre of those quickening influences which proceeded, no one denies, from the person and story of Jesus. Now, if the resurrection of Christ, as an historical fact, be once conceded, of course the general theory of the professors of Christianity is established: that mysterious personage could not have belonged to the normal type of mankind, and His mission must have been Divine: which granted, no contention will any longer be made about the miracles He is said to have performed. Consequently, on the resurrection of Jesus, quite as much as on His recorded wonderful works, hang the issues of the contest between "orthodox" Christianity and

Theism. Until, therefore, the conviction of Paul as to the point can be shown to be worthless, the latter system will be unable to disarm its rival.

At the same time, whatever value may be thought to attach to the independent testimony of St. Paul, it must be conceded that he was not an eye-witness of any of the transactions recorded in the Gospels. On the other hand, the received account of his conversion to the Christian faith, confirmed as it is by statements of his own in epistles generally attributed to him, is certainly very remarkable and very important. His conversion appears to have been brought about by no direct human intervention. It can scarcely be said, then, that, like other converts, Paul received without much inquiry the account of the Christian marvels from the Apostles, who either believed them, or professed to believe them, and that thus his testimony is simply that of a second-hand and second-rate character. For although no doubt, as has been said, there was communication between Paul and the other chief teachers of the Gospel, the great Apostle does not seem to have been indebted to their personal instructions for his first

knowledge of the Christian belief: indeed, we have his own word that the contrary was the case.

THE GOSPELS

LET us now approach the question of the evidential value of the four Gospel narratives. Of not one of the four can it be said that we have any certain knowledge of the circumstances under which it was written; and consequently conjecture has its many theories about each several record. From an early period the marked difference in style and point of view existing between the fourth Gospel and the three generally termed Synoptical, was noticed and commented upon. Of this dissonance various explanations have been hazarded, a common class of which assigns the composition of John's Gospel to a late date and an unknown author. Without entering at present into this question, I would simply remark here that, this difference being confessedly so great, for the sake of convenience the three may be taken together as giving the same general account with variations of circumstance and with their respective additions or omissions, while John's account may be put apart by itself for separate examination.

Now, it is agreed on all hands that in the Synoptical Gospels we have, it is almost certain, a faithful portraiture of the character, words, and acts of the great Prophet who first drew to Himself thousands of His countrymen, and subsequently incurred their bitter enmity. "Faithful *substantially*," many would prefer to say, because the delineation which invests His real actions with a miraculous surrounding must be looked upon (they believe) as the colouring of fancy and of a loving and blind admiration. However, there can be no reasonable doubt that the pages of the evangelists give us the actual man Jesus as He appeared to the people from the midst of whom He had sprung. "How could it have been otherwise?" it has been pertinently asked by those even who do not lay claim to the name of Christian, "where could Jews have been found at that day capable of forming the conception of so perfect a human being, of so entirely unique a character, as these three memoirs present us with?" No: the Jesus of the Gospels is a living and moving personage, not an ideal character—so much so, that while His contemporaries completely failed to understand Him, the honest chronicler, painting the actual man from

the life, has succeeded in conveying to us an impression of something far higher than any model of moral grandeur that fancy could have framed.

There are differences of opinion, it is true, about the date and authorship of each of the first three Gospels: at the same time there is a general concurrence of belief among critics that, even on the supposition of these Gospels not having come down to us in their original form, yet either their "first editions," or else "skeleton forms" or records in substantial accordance with them, were in circulation at a very early period, that is, in the lifetime of some of the Apostles. That many such pristine memoirs were in the hands of the early Christians is certified by writers of the age immediately succeeding the apostolic period. Of these annals "the Gospel according to the Hebrews" is one of the earliest mentioned by name; and the few fragments of it which have been preserved in other early writings present us with a similar account of the acts, character, and words of Jesus, to that found in the received Gospel narratives.*

* Great uncertainty prevails respecting the work known in early times by this name; and it seems not unlikely that more than one treatise, or else various recensions of the same work,

The nature of these annals seems shown us by words occurring in the introduction of our third Gospel. "Many took in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which were most surely believed among the followers of Jesus, even as they were delivered to them by those who were eye-witnesses from the beginning and ministers of the Word." The writer, who then proceeds with the composition of his Gospel, leaves us with the impression that his own work would be, as to its contents, similar to, though perhaps fuller than, those which had anticipated his. How it came to pass that the instinct of the Christian

may have passed under the same name. There is evidence to show that a "Gospel according to the Hebrews" was in early use, and both resembled closely in certain passages our Gospels (especially that of Matthew), and in some particulars differed from them. Then it also appears likely that a Gospel attributed to the Apostle Matthew, and written in Hebrew or Aramaic, went by this name. Some would identify the two. Although the Gospel according to the Hebrews may, perhaps, claim to be the first work of the kind mentioned by name, it by no means follows that the Canonical Gospels were not in existence at an equally early or still earlier period. Evidence of their early date will be given immediately. There can be no doubt that certain "Memoirs" or "Gospel narratives" preceded the Hebrew Gospel as known in the second century.

body seized upon certain of these independent accounts, preserved them, and stamped them as "Canonical," while it neglected the rest, so as, unfortunately, to allow them to perish, it is not necessary to say with positiveness. The simple fact to be noticed at present is that our existing Gospels, certainly at an early period, but precisely how early is disputed, came to be the favourite annals of the Church. But whatever may be said about our Gospels and the Church's reception of them, consistently with the definite knowledge we possess on the subject, it must at least be admitted that we have the means of knowing that the Evangelists give us a faithful summary of what was believed and in circulation about the great Master within the lifetime of those who had been His companions. Hence the inference appears to be legitimate that the substance of our present Gospels is what the Apostles believed and testified, and what their hearers received.

To establish satisfactorily on external evidence the exact date of our Gospels may, indeed, be impossible: but there is no ground whatever for suspecting that the facts of the Gospel, as known to us, including the most mysterious ones, were

unknown to the first Christians, or doubted by any of them; nay more, in the Pauline and other epistles and in the Book of the Revelation these cardinal facts are clearly taken for granted, and form the groundwork for the superstructure of doctrine. So that whatever value the Apostles' testimony may be deemed to possess, the nature and general outlines of the testimony itself we may fairly congratulate ourselves on knowing. The doubt which it is possible to raise with the fairest prospect of success is not where some would put it, viz., in the uncertainty as to what was the substance of the original testimony of the Twelve; but rather, it must content itself with what of course will always be open to dispute—the actual value of their testimony.*

* After writing the words above, I have chanced to come upon certain declarations of Strauss, which exactly coincide with this view. Strauss, reasoning in the interests of pure infidelity, maintains rightly enough that the old rationalistic stories, whether of deception in regard to the death of Jesus, or of the disciples' stealing of the body and their declaring with conscious untruth that their Master was alive again, must be given up—in fact, have long been exploded. He further states that there cannot be the slightest doubt about either the good faith of the disciples or their constant and vehement protesta-

Now, as regards the teaching of the Apostles, if we could be sure that the Book of the Acts was written by a companion of St. Paul (Luke, or any one else in a similar position), we then might

tions that Christ had risen. But now, what explanation has Strauss to give of this state of matters, for, of course, to his mind it is plain that Jesus no more rose from the tomb than that other men rise after being committed to the grave? He is persuaded that the Apostles were themselves deceived, that they actually believed they had seen the risen Jesus, although, in truth, they had not. This is an allegation hard, indeed, to receive; and the more so when we remember that it is certain that a considerable number of other persons shared the Apostles' belief that Jesus had appeared to them: at the same time, of various explanations hazarded, it is probably the one which carries with it the greatest amount of plausibility. Strauss attempts to trace out the evolution of the unconscious deception—and it is certainly a wonderful account of the birth of a myth. "Consternation," we are told, "at the execution of their Master had scared the disciples far from the dangerous metropolis to their native Galilee: here they may have held secret meetings in honour of His memory; they may have found strength in their faith in Him, have searched Scripture through and through, and strained every nerve to reach unto light and certainty. These were spiritual conflicts which, in Oriental, and especially female natures of an unbalanced religious and fantastical development, easily turned into ecstasies and visions. As soon as it seemed once patent that He could not have remained in the grave—being the Messiah—the step was not great to the tidings—we have seen Him

be said to have conclusive evidence on this point—that the teaching embraced the miraculous facts relating to Christ, His origin and resurrection, and the miracles performed by Him. The author, at

who hath risen from the dead, He hath met us, spoken with us; we did not know Him at first, but afterwards, when He had departed, the scales fell from our eyes, we saw that it could have been none other than He. And in successive narratives the manifestations grew even more palpable: He had eaten with the disciples, had shown them His hands and feet, and bid them place their fingers in His wounds. Thus the disciples, by elaborating the conceptions of the resurrection of their slain Master, had rescued His work: and, moreover, it was their honest conviction that they had actually beheld and conversed with the risen Lord. It was no case of pious deception, but all the more of self-deception: embellishment and legend, of course, although possibly still in good faith, soon became intermingled with it.”—*The Old Faith and the New*, by D. F. STRAUSS. I cannot but feel that we are greatly indebted to this able thinker for showing us so candidly and graphically within what kind of defences argumentative unbelief is forced to intrench itself. In opposition to doubts expressed in other quarters, Strauss acknowledges that the fact of the Apostolic preaching of the Resurrection of Christ admits of no question. A question, however, naturally presents itself in this form, “Can that spirit of religious sobriety and that practical wisdom evoked and animated by profoundest convictions of truth which pervade the New Testament and which built up the Christian Church have really had their rise in the breasts of such visionaries as our critic describes—men

all events, professes to know that such was the character of the Apostles' teaching. And, further, it is very difficult to believe that he was not a companion of Paul, the minute touches of parts of his narrative being very much in favour of his own implied assertion that he accompanied the great Apostle in many of his wanderings. Again, the numerous, though frequently slight, incidental points of agreement between the narrative of the Acts and the several Pauline Epistles are calculated to strengthen the belief that the writer of the former is actually what he professes to be.*

who allowed themselves to dream that they had seen the familiar countenance, had heard the familiar voice, which, in truth, the grave had for ever hidden, for ever hushed ? ” It may be added that Strauss acknowledges to the full the grand practical effects of Christianity, and it grieves him at his heart that they should have to be credited to belief in the fiction (so he considers it) of the Resurrection of Jesus.

* This coincidence is all the more striking as being evidently undesigned. Sometimes the writer of the Acts and St. Paul appear to contradict each other, as, *e.g.*, in their respective accounts of the events following the conversion of the latter. Here it is only by assuming that we have from Paul himself a fuller and more accurate report that we can bring the two statements into harmony.

It would follow, of course, on the persuasion of the Book of the Acts being the production of one who was personally acquainted with Paul, that an equally early date (about A.D. 63), or, in strictness of speaking, a somewhat earlier one, must be assigned to the Gospel of Luke; for it is absolutely certain, from the close similarity of style and diction, that the two treatises proceed from the same pen. But the theory may be maintained in the absence of direct rebutting evidence, that although the Book of the Acts might, if sifted, yield a residuum of notes furnished by Luke, or some equally early annalist, yet the treatise, as we know it, has been "worked up" by some later hand—in which case it becomes impossible to decide how much or how little may have been added or may be due to imagination. And so with the Gospel of Luke, the same late hand (it must have been the same) may have put *that* into its present form. Of course such a hypothesis may be called an arbitrary one, as having no external evidence to support it, and deriving but little support either from internal probabilities; and again, arbitrary altogether must be the selection of what is to be retained as

primitive and what rejected—the criterion being each man's sense of fitness and likelihood.* But even on the assumption of this hypothesis, with the two treatises in our hands, made up, it is suggested, of earlier documents, it is still very hard to believe that the Apostles did not proclaim the actual Resurrection and reappearance of their Master, or ascribe to Him the working of signs and wonders.†

For, to sum up the preceding statements, while the actual date and the actual original form of all our present Gospels are disputed, (1) No one disputes the fact that in the very earliest days of the Church various written ac-

* Luke, or, at least, the author of the two works, has been often charged with "making mistakes" about facts. For a long time he was said, *e.g.*, to have given a wrong title to the governor of Cyprus, whom he calls "Proconsul." Subsequently it has been proved that "Proconsul" was the strictly accurate title in St. Paul's days, although in the early part of the reign of Augustus it would not have been so. In regard to the difficulty connected with Cyrenius and the "taxing" (Luke ii.), it is now held to be almost certain that the matter is correctly stated.

† The fact of the Resurrection of Jesus and of His reappearance to His disciples runs through the whole texture of the Book of the Acts, and gives it its key-note.

counts were in general circulation of what was received among Christians ; (2) Nor is there any reason for supposing that such accounts varied from the Apostles' teaching in the views taken by each respectively of the character and life of Jesus ; (3) Nor, again, is it to be imagined that these documents differed in substance from those which we now possess, even setting aside the supposition that we may possibly be handling at the present day some of these identical earliest accounts. To insist, however, at greater length on the probable sameness of the substance of our Gospels, as to the Person and the Resurrection of Christ, with what was held in the Apostles' time and by the Apostles themselves, may seem superfluous, when we are able to fall back on the testimony of St. Paul, who represented unquestionably the earliest faith of the Church.*

* There is an attempt made at the present day to separate altogether the teaching of the Apostle Paul from that of the Twelve, and to constitute him the author of what is now sometimes termed "Ecclesiastical Christianity." But this enterprise is a manifest failure. It is scarcely necessary to expose its futility. Suffice it to say that Paul, in his contention with Peter (of which a great deal is attempted to be made by the theorists), for the purpose of showing that the two

It is not difficult to see why the origin of the present Gospels should be involved in obscurity, whether the authorship assigned to them by tradition be in each or any case correct or not. The New Testament did not suddenly emerge above the horizon of the Christian Church as a finished whole, a bright and perfect luminary, but one book after another made its appearance in a tenta-

had different Gospels), implies that Peter, in his heart, holds the same views as himself, and makes this fact the very basis of his reproof, inasmuch as Peter is practically denying his own principles (Gal. ii.).

The "Gospel of the circumcision," and that of the "uncircumcision" were, it is evident, not two distinct forms of teaching, but identically the same good message, proclaimed to the Jew on the one hand, and to the Gentile on the other. To the latter this message was "the Gospel of the grace of God," offered with equal freeness to all men without exception; to the former it was the fulfilment of the "promises made unto the fathers," proclaiming salvation to all by Christ alone, but still permitting for a while, though never enjoining, the practice of the ceremonial law. The words of Tertulian may be accepted as furnishing a clear and concise explanation of the "two Gospels:" "*Inter se distributionem officii ordinauerunt, non separationem evangelii, nec ut aliud alter sed ut aliis alter prædicarent.*"

Then the General Epistles, together with that to the Hebrews, (whoever their authors,) set forth precisely the same Gospel as Paul.

tive form, as it were ; now from this centre of the brotherhood, and then again from that. Side by side with the writings now deemed canonical, existed, as we have seen, other annals speaking of the same events as our Gospels ; and it was only in the course of years that any one book found its way to the eyes and to the acceptance of the whole Christian community. No one living is in a position to say how soon any particular book received the general recognition of being "Scripture," a sacred writing. It is well known that long after the composition of St. Paul's Epistles, the early "Fathers" confined the term "Scripture" to the Old Testament. Again, we have proof that for a long time the Christian believers placed oral instruction on at least a par in point of value with that afforded by writings ; so that it was natural that those who wrote in early times in defence of Christianity, or concerning it, should appeal to the tradition of the Church rather than to written treatises. Thus it is not surprising that the writers who, in point of time, were the immediate successors of the Apostles, should have quoted sparingly and partially the volume which we now call the New Testament, but which was

no collected volume then. There being thus no primitive formal authorisation of each book as it was penned and slowly introduced to the notice of the brethren, the authorship and the date of composition became necessarily matters of tradition. Having said thus much, however, I ought to state, on the other hand, that such floating tradition as was connected with the history of many of the books reputed sacred, was, at no very late period, caught up and fixed by systematic writers in works which have come down to us,—that is to say, before the close of the second century; while, at an earlier period, certain of the books are quoted under their author's name. Unfortunately, works which we have good reason to believe would have given us much of the information we desire, have perished.

We are left, therefore, with early tradition—to be sifted and confronted with such internal evidence as the writings themselves furnish—together with numerous quotations and allusions in either whole treatises or fragmentary sentences of writers of antiquity. On the whole, we find that a strong case is made out in favour of a very early origin of our (Synoptical) Gospels in a form either

identical with their present shape, or closely related to it. The simple denial of their early origin on assumed grounds of probability, without good proof adduced, can of course carry no weight with it; and, further, to make the contents of the records, if contrary to preconceived notions of the likelihood of events, a decisive proof of the spuriousness of such writings, is a begging of the question of their authenticity, and, at best, can be regarded as an uncertain inference.

GOSPEL OF ST. MATTHEW

BUT now to come to particulars. The first of our Gospels, having the traditionary name of the Gospel of the Apostle Matthew, is by many supposed to be spoken of by the ancient writer Papias, a friend of Polycarp, living in the early part of the second century, who asserts that "Matthew composed the oracles (τὰ λόγια) in the Hebrew dialect, and each person interpreted" (or translated) "them according to his ability." This statement as to the original Hebrew or Aramaic form of Matthew's work is confirmed by the unanimous voice of antiquity. Papias (whose words have been preserved by Eusebius) mentions a certain presbyter, John, "a

disciple of the Lord," as his authority.* There is a difference of opinion as to the meaning of "oracles," but the general belief of the learned is, that the designation is not to be restricted to the discourses of Christ, but may be rightfully extended to what Christ did—in short, that a Gospel, whether brief or full, is described. It has been justly observed, both by those who uphold the authority of our Gospel by Matthew, and by those who impugn it, that the expression of Papias implies that in his day, or rather in the earlier days of the recollection of his informant, there existed (what at one time did not exist) a Greek translation of the Aramaic work. Perhaps this testimony may be fairly considered to apply to as early a period as A.D. 100, although it is certain that Papias actually committed his remarks to writing many years afterwards.

That Matthew was credited with the composition of a Gospel is explicitly stated by Pantænus

* John the Presbyter, though styled "a disciple of the Lord," does not appear to have been an actual hearer of Christ. He lived at Ephesus in the lifetime of John the Apostle, whom he survived, and had conversed with many of the companions of the Lord.

towards the close of the second century (according to the testimony of Eusebius and Jerome), who also mentions its Hebrew form. Somewhat earlier Irenæus had mentioned the same facts. Afterwards follows to the same effect the testimony of Origen, preserved also by Eusebius. Jerome remarks that it is uncertain by whom the Hebrew Gospel of Matthew was translated into Greek. But the question has still to be decided, "What is the exact relation between the old Hebrew Gospel and our present Greek one?" It is quite possible that what we possess represents faithfully the Hebrew original, and evidence can be produced in favour of this supposition; at the same time doubt has been raised about it. It can be shown, for instance, that long before the close of the second century a Greek Matthew (known to Irenæus and contemporary writers) was in circulation, and was substantially, indeed identically, the same as ours, and that meanwhile, although the Greek version was deemed canonical, an Aramaic Matthew still survived, but was little consulted. Now, as Papias appears to imply that more than half a century before there was in existence a translation in Greek, is not an identity

between this translation and the Matthew used by Irenæus probable? Still, we have no certainty: indeed the whole question of the relation between the Hebrew and Greek Gospels of Matthew seems involved in hopeless obscurity.

For instance Jerome, near the end of the fourth century, met with what was regarded as a copy of the Aramaic Matthew. He appears to identify it with the Gospel according to the Hebrews, which work, he says, he had translated into Latin and Greek, adding that it was generally reputed to be the authentic work of Matthew. In spite, therefore, of possible additions and corruptions which may have existed in the copy of this Gospel with which Jerome became acquainted, we must suppose that there was at least a tolerably close agreement between it and the canonical Greek Matthew, with which the great Latin Father was so familiar, and which he translated into his native tongue, and elucidated with his comments. It is natural, indeed, to ask, "Had the Greek version, *i.e.* the canonical one, been an exact rendering of the Aramaic Gospel which Jerome lighted upon, would he have translated this latter work?" His labours at translation seem to point at least to

some variation. On the other hand, it may be argued that his silence as to their diversity is opposed to the view of the two being entirely distinct works, since we know from his own words that he looked upon the canonical Greek Gospel as a simple version of the original Hebrew work of Matthew.

But before the days of Jerome, Eusebius drew a distinction between the Hebrew Matthew and the Gospel according to the Hebrews. Putting together the various notices respecting this latter work which are found in early writers, we are led to the conclusion that, in all probability, Matthew's genuine work received in certain quarters the name of the Gospel according to the Hebrews, and then the original work underwent considerable and successive alterations and additions, so that what in later years passed indifferently under the name of "the Gospel according to the Hebrews," "the Gospel of the Nazarenes," or "the Gospel of the Ebionites," was actually a recension of the Hebrew Matthew, varying as to fidelity with the date of the particular copy.

It is generally considered that our Greek Matthew bears marks of its not being a simple translation,

but has the appearance of originality. It has frequently been asserted, indeed, that the Greek version, or recension, was in existence in the Apostolic days ; and the conjecture has been put forward that Matthew himself may have supplied the translation. But no conclusive evidence can be adduced in support even of the first statement, while the conjecture stands on a still more slender basis of proof. However, it is certain that the early Fathers used our Greek Matthew and neglected the Aramaic work : at quite an early date the Gospel according to the Hebrews came to be looked upon as uncanonical. So far as certainty is concerned we must rest satisfied with knowing that our Greek Gospel is of a very early date, and at a very early period took the place of the Hebrew as respects general use.

It should be borne in mind, when our present question is under consideration, that between all three Synoptic Gospels there occurs, together with a great similarity of matter, a frequent verbal agreement indicating, it may be thought, a proximity of date of composition, as well as a common access to certain very early documents or notes of events, or an acquaintance with the same stream

of oral tradition.* Probable allusions to a Greek Matthew are to be found of an early date, but the precise date of these allusions cannot be verified. Thus, Irenæus (about A.D. 180) speaks generally of "elders, disciples of the Apostles," and makes an "elder, who had heard those who had seen the Apostles," allude to "the Queen of the South," and the Parable of the Talents, and use certain marked expressions which we find in St. Matthew. However, of course in these passages reference *may* have been made to some other Gospel then extant. At the same time we can affirm that it might very well have been made to our Gospel, from which Irenæus himself quotes copiously. Barnabas (probably about A.D. 120) quotes from our Gospel. Justin Martyr appears to have been well acquainted with

* Together with this resemblance, however, so considerable a diversity is to be noticed in arrangement and style, that the independent authorship of each several record is fully vindicated. Also the portion of original matter supplied by each (at all events by Matthew and Luke) is not inconsiderable. Copyists none of the three can be considered, although it is possible that the earliest Gospel, or Gospels, may have been seen by the writer, or writers, who succeeded. Mark has so much in common with Matthew on the one hand, and with Luke on the other, that many critics imagine that the works of his brother Evangelists must have been known to him.

the Gospel ; his profession of Christianity was made about the year 130.* It is evident that the Greek Gospel was allowed to take the place of the Hebrew without a complaint on the part of any that something new was foisted in ; but the real history of the substitution is unknown.

GOSPEL OF ST. MARK

OF Mark's Gospel the earliest mention is made by Papias, preserved (equally with his mention of Matthew's Hebrew Gospel) by Eusebius. He gives a more detailed account of this work, which he received, he says, from the Presbyter John. Mark is called Peter's interpreter, and is stated to have "recorded accurately all that he remembered of the things said and done by Christ,

* Certain critics seem to give themselves unnecessary trouble in their desire to demonstrate Justin's ignorance of Matthew's Gospel. For instance, a great deal is made of the transposition by Justin of two members of the 27th verse of chapter xi. It is shown that three times Justin cites the passage thus transposed—thus adopting the well-known reading of certain sects. The inference is hence drawn that Justin did not get his quotation from Matthew. But now, Origen and Irenæus, who held the canonicity of our Gospel to the exclusion of that of Gospels resembling it, make the citation in precisely the same way.

though not in order. For he himself neither heard the Lord nor followed Him, but received His teaching later from Peter, who just spoke as his hearers might read, and did not make an orderly narrative of the Lord's discourses. Mark, however, kept free from error, as he just wrote down what he remembered, and took pains to omit nothing of what he had heard, and to state nothing incorrectly." At first sight this may seem to be almost conclusive proof of the authenticity of our Second Gospel, or at least of its very early date. But on reflection the question naturally arises, "Can this description be fairly said to apply to one Gospel? may there not have been in existence at the time another work which was more of a miscellany than what goes now by the name of St. Mark's Gospel?" Now, of two difficulties presented to us, the less grave one will, on the whole, perhaps, appear to be the reconciling the account of Papias with the narrative so familiar to us. For if we adopt the alternative course, and deny the identity of the primitive work with the present Gospel, we are landed in this entanglement—we have to suppose that in the same age two perfectly distinct writings, held

in equal general esteem, and of which the subject matter was similar, went under the name of the same author, since some fifty years after the time of Papias, who speaks of Mark's annals, and derives them expressly from Peter's preaching, Irenæus is acquainted with one Gospel, which he also describes as Mark's writing of the things preached by Peter.* We have to suppose, too, that not only Irenæus, but other writers, such as Clement and Origen, made a confusion between the two works, applying, as they do, remarks respecting the canonical Gospel which rightfully belong (on the hypothesis) to the earlier document—which document must in some strange way have disappeared in the interval between Irenæus and Papias. After all, is the description given by Papias altogether inapplicable to our Gospel? Might it not be conceived to be the record of certain statements made by an actual eye-witness to one who carefully treasured up what was delivered? Again, has it exactly the same orderly arrangement as Matthew's Gospel? It

* This clearly would not be the same thing as two works passing under the same *general* name of "Gospel according to the Hebrews."

should be remembered that Jerome (who of course used the canonical Mark) states that he wrote *a short Gospel* at the request of the Roman Christians, and that Peter, whose interpreter Mark was, dictated it, and subsequently authorised its use. Irenæus, on the other hand, says that Peter was dead when Mark wrote his Gospel.

One remaining hypothesis ought to be mentioned, as propounded by modern critics—it is this. The substitution of our present Gospel for the short and unsystematised annals of Mark may have been made even before the time of Papias and the Presbyter John, so that they, recording a true tradition about Mark, applied it erroneously to what alike was to them and is to us the Gospel of Mark. In this case, we have to notice that they were not disturbed by any incongruity between the ancient description of the Evangelist's writing, and the present form of the Gospel.* Meanwhile,

* This hypothesis supplies us with a hint towards a possibly correct solution. Why may not Mark himself have subsequently added to his memoranda received from Peter other details gathered either from existing documents or from oral testimony, and embodied them in his work? The abrupt commencement of his Gospel gives some countenance to the

it is to be remembered that according to the testimony of Papias, the Presbyter John was acquainted with his namesake the Apostle, and with other hearers and actual followers of Christ. Hence it is a hard matter to exclude with any show of reasonableness the Gospel of St. Mark from the list of authentic works.*

GOSPEL OF ST. LUKE

LET me now speak of the third Gospel. Irenæus (about A.D. 180) is the earliest extant writer who attributes it expressly to Luke. But there is no doubt that many years earlier, Marcion (about A.D. 130) had Luke's Gospel, and considered it of very high authority. He spoke of "the Gospel" as one portion of the writings he deemed sacred; and this Gospel was in substance that of Luke with certain variations and omissions. Irenæus, however, is the first writer who speaks distinctly by name of the four existing Gospels, as being in general use, and the only recognised ones. He

notion of its being framed in the manner traditionally described.

* Justin appears to allude distinctly to St. Mark's Gospel, under the name, however, of "Memoirs of Peter." The use of this name casts a little uncertainty upon the citation.

gives reasons (of no cogency certainly) why there should be four Gospels, and only four. His testimony as to fact, apart from his theories, has a considerable value, as showing us that before the close of the second century our present Gospels had taken the position they still retain in the Christian Church. Indeed, his testimony may be said to extend further back than I have stated, since he was born about A.D. 140, and appears never to have esteemed canonical any Gospels besides our four. But before the time of Irenæus, Justin Martyr (A.D. 150), though he does not mention the names of the authors of the Gospels, appears to have been familiar with those of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and to quote frequently from them. It has often been suggested (as by Bishop March, some sixty years ago) that the quotations may have been taken from an apocryphal Gospel: if so, that apocryphal Gospel, thought to be the Gospel according to the Hebrews, must have very closely resembled our Matthew and Luke. Justin alludes to "Memoirs which were composed by the Apostles and those who followed them." This description seems to suit our Gospels, and indeed may, perhaps,

appear to us to be referable to them rather than to other writings, when we bear in mind that very shortly after, as shown by Irenæus, only the four canonical Gospels were recognised by the Church. Further, Justin says of these Memoirs that they were called Gospels (although he also speaks of "the Gospel" as a record): they contained a record of all things concerning Jesus Christ; were received generally by Christians, and were read in their public services.*

That Luke's Gospel was in existence by the year A.D. 120 is, I believe, disputed by no critic

* Dr. Davidson, (taking him in his present phase of opinion,) who denies the generally received authorship of our Gospels, considers it a matter beyond dispute that Justin was acquainted with the first three, but believes that he did not know the fourth, which Gospel, indeed, that learned critic assigns to the middle of the second century. His account of the matter is, that Justin used the three canonical Gospels together with other gospels, or treatises, no longer extant. A modern writer, speaking of Justin's testimony, says it is not of a nature to establish the date, authenticity, and character of Gospels professing to communicate such astonishing doctrines as our Sacred Writings propound. Perhaps not; but it clearly establishes the fact of the belief of such doctrines, and of the existence of records (whether or not our Gospels) containing them in his own day.

of note. Those who deny the authorship of Luke assign an early year in the second century as the date of its composition.

GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN

THE Gospel of St. John has been, and is still, the subject of endless conjectures. As regards the evidence respecting its composition afforded by the book itself, most discordant views are held ; some, even of those who handle freely the Christian records, maintaining that it must have come from the hand of a companion of the Master ; others, with equal positiveness, affirming that it is replete with marks of a later age. All acknowledge a marked difference in treatment and subject matter between John and the Synoptists. A considerable difference in diction can also be pointed out between the Fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse, which in a very early age was attributed to the Apostle John, as, for instance, by Justin Martyr. It is clear that the writer of the Gospel wishes to be taken for that Apostle, although he refrains from mentioning his name. It is therefore maintained by some, that although the Gospel was in all probability not the com-

position of John himself, it is likely to have proceeded from the circle of his disciples, who would gladly have seen honour attached to the name of the venerable Apostle. Some, again, see in the lengthened discourses of the Fourth Gospel the most sublime utterances to be found among men: others allow themselves to talk of their prolixity and want of coherence: one late writer, Mr. Mill, goes so far as to pronounce them "poor stuff"—an expression, on all grounds, to be regretted. Should the opinion be correct that a disciple of John, and not John himself, penned the Gospel, even in this case considerable authority would attach to the statement of facts and to the general tenour of the sayings. The theory of "a learned Greek" having composed this most remarkable and beautiful treatise late in the second century, and the fanciful hypothesis of its being a religious novel composed with very little accurate knowledge of the real Jesus and His circumstances, crumble away on a first vigorous handling of them. No supposition appears to be adequate to explain the life-like discourse of Jesus represented as having been delivered on the eve of His betrayal, except that which makes the

report of it come immediately from a hearer. We can imagine no learned Greek of the second century, writing as Jesus is said to have spoken. Let us only contrast in our minds for one moment the tone of the best of the Apologists of that time with that which runs through the discourses of Christ, so inimitably painted in the Gospel as occupying the position of a Divine Master addressing weak and yet confiding followers. Those who adhere to the old traditional opinion that John's Gospel was written by John, have to suppose that this one of the Apostles entered far more than the other annalists into the interior teaching of the Master, that he composed his work from a different standpoint, and with a different definite aim, and that his idiosyncrasy contributed to the peculiar line taken by his "theological" Gospel. From what has been handed down to us of the two individuals, it might be argued in the same way that we should expect a Gospel by Thomas to differ considerably from one by Peter. Still, perhaps no attempt will ever be considered quite successful, which would account for the wide divergence between works supposed alike to issue from witnesses of what Christ did and said. Such

dissonance as exists should neither be toned down on the one hand, nor exaggerated on the other. The existence of certain differences as to matter of fact is not difficult to understand: many probably might be reconciled had we fuller information, and some may be put down to the same cause which produced variations of detail between the respective reports of the several Synoptists. Probably the most remarkable difference in a matter of fact is the varying representation given of the day on which Jesus suffered, all the Synoptists apparently assigning the event to the day succeeding the Passover, the 15th Nisan; John's Gospel to the day of the Passover itself. Both accounts, indeed, give the same day of the week to the Crucifixion, Friday; but that Friday appears to have been according to one view the 15th Nisan, according to the other the 14th.* Other

* Probably the most successful theory purposing to reconcile the difference, is that which makes John's account strictly accurate, and then supposes that the Synoptists reckon the first day of unleavened bread as commencing with the previous eve (that of 13th Nisan), and intend to assign the sending forth of the disciples to make preparation to that precise time. Thus Greswell places this incident at the hour of sunset, viz., that setting which, according to

differences as to matters of fact are not so marked as this one. For instance, it has been noticed as a discrepancy that the Fourth Gospel gives either three or two years to the ministry of Jesus, while the other Gospels give a single year: but the simple explanation appears to be that in the one case some note of time is given, in the other there is no defining of time during the period of the ministry. So, again, it has been pointed out that in the one account we have a ministry in

Jewish reckoning, was the division between the 13th and 14th Nisan. The Last Supper is thus regarded to have been held the evening before that of the regular Paschal Feast, in accordance with the distinct representation of John. We can scarcely be fit judges of the probability or improbability of the preparations for Christ's apprehension being made just at the hour when, according to one view, the Jewish population would have been celebrating the Passover—so as to found any argument of weight on such judgment. It has been argued that the subsequent "Easter Controversy" proves the erroneousness of John's representation. Dr. Farrar's remark (*Life of Christ*) to the effect that it really throws no light on the question, seems to be justified by fact. It is certain, indeed, that the "Quartodecimans," in accordance with their name, observed their feast on the evening of the 14th, but the origin of the observance is by no means made out clearly. The most probable account appears to be, that originally the Jewish

Judæa and at Jerusalem, in the other a ministry confined exclusively to Galilee: in this instance the two accounts may be held to be complementary to each other. Besides, we see in John traces at least of a sojourn in the Northern Province (John vi. 1), in the Synoptists of visits to Jerusalem (as *e.g.*, in the fact of the friendship with the family at Bethany). Some critics have found fault with John's Gospel for making mistakes about details of place, about names, &c.; thus we are told that Annas ought not to have been called the High Priest. Here, probably, it

Christians (and among them, according to Polycarp, the Apostle John) kept up the celebration of the Passover on the legal day, without any reference to the exact day, either of the Last Supper or of the Suffering; but subsequently a party arose who connected the annual celebration with the day of the former event, pleading the authority of the Synoptists for their view of the correspondence of the evening of the Supper with that of the 14th Nisan. With this view of the matter the language of Eusebius himself, and that of early writers, preserved in his history and in other records, seem to agree. Neander's view is, that from the first it was a celebration in remembrance of Christ's suffering, as having occurred on the 14th Nisan, and therefore a distinctly Christian observance, not a Passover commemoration. The controversy affords us no evidence of any importance.

is our own information which is defective. As to the High Priesthood of Annas, the same title is given him in the Book of the Acts ; and, since we know from Josephus that he had once been High Priest, but was deposed indeed from his office, we can quite understand the retention of the designation by the sacred historians, and the more readily, as he appears to have occupied an influential position. John's expression respecting Caiaphas, that he was "High Priest that year," seems to carry in it an allusion to the frequent changes which then occurred in the office, although "that year" was in fact the fifth of the occupancy of Caiaphas. Between Annas and Caiaphas no less than three High Priests had been appointed and removed. Of how little account variation in details was considered anciently, may be gathered from the circumstance that each one of the four Evangelists differs from each of the others in the wording of the title on the Cross.

A matter at first sight more difficult to account for on the hypothesis of John's authorship than mere discrepancies in the relation of facts, is the difference in the Master's line and method of teaching, as described respectively in the Fourth

Gospel and in the other connected three. Every reader must be aware of this difference, and how strongly marked it is. The question, accordingly, has been often canvassed, "Can Christ have taught in both ways, and if so, how can the fact be explained that the one method is reported exclusively by John, and the other exclusively by the Synoptists?" Without attempting to set at rest this question, I would just make these few suggestions. The Fourth Gospel may have been intended by its author to be supplementary to previously published accounts, according to the old tradition to this effect: the style of address as employed in the inner circle of Christ's family of disciples might well differ greatly from what was used in public, when the vehicle of parables was deemed suitable and these private addresses constitute a considerable portion of John's report: it is with Judaic opponents that Christ argues in the Fourth Gospel, and not with the simple folk of Galilee. Then it may be said: a mind peculiarly gifted might seize upon peculiarities of the diversified instructions of a "myriad-minded" Teacher, which others would fail to make their own: the author of the Fourth Gospel speaks of a peculiar

closeness of affection as subsisting between the Master and himself: his life was drawn into the life of Jesus, and he paints his Lord as he knew Him. Again, we meet with an occasional passage in the Synoptics which may be considered parallel to what appears in John, as *e.g.*, Matt. xi. 25—30. So, conversely, John is not quite wanting in the parabolic form, as in the instances of the Door and the Shepherd.* It has sometimes been objected (nor can the objection create surprise) that no

* The "critical" view of the discrepancy is, perhaps, a little overstrained, as seems shown by the following instance. The Gospel according to the Hebrews is generally considered by critics to resemble the Synoptic Gospels, especially Matthew, and to exhibit their representation of Christ's teaching. But at the same time, in reference to a well-known passage of Justin's writings, in which he appears to many readers to be quoting John's Gospel, critics, and among them Dr. Davidson, tell us that in all probability his citation is taken from the Gospel according to the Hebrews. It would therefore appear, according to the judgment of the learned, that that lost work was able to exhibit in combination the peculiarities both of the Synoptists and of the Fourth Gospel, while it is still considered to have been the production of a single writer.

Justin's quotation is this: "Christ Himself said, unless ye be regenerated, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. And that it is impossible for such as have been once born to enter the wombs of their mothers is manifest to all."

"unlearned man," as in the Acts (to which book critics seem for the moment to allow authenticity) John is represented as being, could have written the Gospel. The same critics believe, however, that the "unlearned and ignorant man" wrote the Apocalypse, of which it can only be said that the grammatical style is less pure than that of the Gospel—for as to its topics, they must be acknowledged to be supremely grand, and as to its theology, it is the exact counterpart of the theology of the Gospel of St. John. "Then," it is further said, "the theology of St. John differs altogether from that of the other Evangelists." That his theology is for the most part exhibited in a far more developed form than theirs is not for a moment to be denied, but this fact is entirely consistent with the traditional account of his undertaking the writing of his Gospel. The earlier records described in a perfectly artless manner the things which Jesus did, and some of the more striking features of His public teaching. Now, John was requested at the close of his long life (so early story went, as reported by no mean critic a century afterwards,) to put on record his own impression of the Saviour and of His spiritual

teaching. To this request he assented, it is said, and we have the result of his reminiscences in his Gospel. Now, it is to be noted that although John's theology differs from the general tone of that of the Synoptists, there are passages in the latter which come up to the level of St. John, and moreover (and this is most important to observe), the theology of the "beloved disciple" is in entire conformity with that of St. Paul, and with that of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and of the First Epistle of St. Peter. These Epistles, marked by the most advanced tone of theology, were written, we have reason to believe, before the Gospel of St. John. So that the necessity for a late date on the score of the Johannine theology, is not in the slightest degree made out. Also the favourite allegation of "Alexandrine bias" falls to the ground, unless it be conceded that the Pauline writings are influenced by the same bias of Alexandrine theology.*

It is a favourite modern objection to the genuineness of the Gospel, that the author's studied aim is

* See Neander's comparison between the Johannine and Pauline systems of doctrine in the last chapter of his *Planting of the Church*.

to exalt unduly "the beloved disciple," and in a corresponding degree to disparage Peter. Nothing can well be more absurd than such a charge. The objectors notice, for instance, that we have the title of "the disciple whom Jesus loved" only from the (assumed) John himself; that apart from the Fourth Gospel there is nothing to countenance any claim to pre-eminence for John; that his alleged acquaintance with the High Priest is a most improbable circumstance, and is mentioned apparently to give him importance! Now, although it is true that we read of John's peculiar nearness to Jesus only in John's Gospel, yet the Synoptists impress us with the notion that he, together with Peter and James, stood specially high in the Master's esteem. Then, twenty years afterwards, we find him, according to Paul, prominent among the Apostles as a "pillar." As to depreciation of Peter, it is the merest fancy, and a most gratuitous assumption. In the two recorded incidents at the Last Supper connected with Simon Peter, the bearing of this Apostle as described by John is eminently characteristic, and corresponds perfectly with notices of him in the three other Gospels.

Lastly, as to the High Priest, the nature of the

acquaintance is not stated, and it is utterly useless to form any conjecture about it. John is represented as being at or near the Jordan when he first saw Jesus. He may have been in the habit of going to Jerusalem in the prosecution of his father's trade, who had servants of his own to help him. We know not.

It has been made an objection to the Johannine authorship, that the writer alludes to the Jews and to Jewish customs as though he were a stranger to them. Now, if the Gospel proceeded not from the centre of Judaism, but from Ephesus, as tradition invariably relates, it would seem only natural that Jewish matters should thus be spoken of.* We may observe here in passing, that in spite of the great difference noticeable between the fourth and the three other Gospels, there are also points of such close resemblance as makes it quite conceivable

* One special objection has been made in a late work to the use of the word *Ἰουδαῖος* by John, who designates the Jewish people by this name. Although it is true (as there stated) that the word is generally applied to heathen nations, this is not invariably the case. We have several instances to the contrary in Luke's Gospel and the Acts. It is a mistake, too, to think that the corresponding Hebrew word is applied exclusively to the heathen in the Old Testament.

that the author of the former was familiar either with one or more of the others, or with materials which served them as a basis.

One question which cannot be disconnected from our present inquiry is concerned with the relation of the Gospel to the First Epistle of John. Did they proceed from the same author? The similarity of sentiment and style is so great, that the general opinion is in favour of an identity of authorship. If John be thought to have written the Epistle, the feeling of the probability of the Gospel being his is certainly strengthened. It is to be borne in mind, too, that the author of the Epistle represents himself as having been a companion of the Lord, and uses language peculiarly suitable to a "beloved disciple." Further, we may remark, that were such a representation fictitious, the solemn high-toned contents of the Epistle would ill assort with the false claims of the introductory sentence—a moral impossibility would almost seem to be involved in such a supposition.

The great difference between the respective styles of the Gospel and the Apocalypse will always, perhaps, present a difficulty to those who would identify the authors of the two works. At the

same time it would not be safe to say that the difficulty was insurmountable, since certain peculiar points of resemblance in the diction of each can be pointed out,* and something may fairly be allowed for the difference in the nature of the subjects handled in the one and the other ; added to which, it may be true, as asserted, that thirty years elapsed between the composition of the Revelation and that of the Gospel, and that during this period the author was living in the midst of a Greek-speaking population. Still, it is fair to state

* Thus in the Gospel (as well as in the First Epistle) the Son is entitled "the Word ;" in the Apocalypse He is styled "the Word of God." The absolute Divinity of Christ is set forth equally and emphatically in the two works. In both (and only here) He is called "the Lamb." The expression "to keep the word" often occurs in the Gospel and the Revelation, and once in the First Epistle of St. John, but not elsewhere in the New Testament ; so "tabernacled" is found once in the Gospel and four times in the Revelation.

Dr. Davidson, who believes the Apocalypse to have been the production of St. John, and the Gospel that of a later writer, freely acknowledges that he considers it "proved that the correspondences" between the two works "are not accidental, and either betray the same author, or show that the writer of the one book was influenced by the ideas and language of the other."

that many distinguished and unbiassed critics have pronounced it a thing incredible and impossible that the two works should have proceeded from the same pen.

But leaving internal evidence, let us inquire how far external testimony is in favour of an early date for the Gospel, and of a connexion with the Apostle John. It is not disputed that by the close of the second century the Gospel was well known and generally attributed to John : in fact, no one who has regard for evidence denies (I believe) that it must have been in existence before the year 150. The first extant testimony to the authorship is given about A.D. 176 by Theophilus of Antioch, who quotes the opening words of the Gospel, and calls them John's. The Clementine Homilies (of the same date) cite words of the Gospel without giving its name. Tatian, a contemporary writer, also evidently quotes from it, and the same may be said of the celebrated letter from the Churches of Vienne and Lyons, A.D. 177.* From the several

* We have no direct evidence as to Papias' knowledge of the Gospel. Eusebius states that he quoted the First Epistle of St. John. If Eusebius is correct, and if it be conceded that the hand which penned the Gospel penned also the General

close resemblances in the writings of Justin to passages of St. John, it has been inferred, with a fair amount of probability, that he knew the Gospel. If it be contended after a comparison of all the similar passages that Justin did not know our Gospel, then it must be said that the Gospel which he did know, and from which he drew his citations, must have singularly resembled John's in numerous places. Perhaps it is scarcely safe to speak more positively, for Justin in no one instance gives the exact words of the Fourth Gospel. Nor is it a point of any very great practical importance, as we have the undoubted testimony of several writers dating only a quarter of a century later than Justin. A more important and interesting controversy has been raised respecting an alleged testimony a good deal earlier than Justin's would be. In a recently recovered work, attributed to Hippolytus, there is an *apparent* statement that Basilides, A.D. 125, used words which all agree were extracted from John's Gospel. But the matter to decide is whether this is the actual statement of

Epistle, we have evidence in this statement in favour of an early date.

Hippolytus. If the words are to be strictly taken, there can be no doubt that he is speaking in the connexion referred to of Basilides. For (to take one of two instances) mentioning Basilides by name, Hippolytus affirms that "he says the seed of the world arose out of the things that are not, the word that was spoken, Let there be light; and this he says, is what is related in the Gospels: it was the true light that lighteneth every man coming into the world." When this long lost work was recovered and published in England (1851), Bunsen, among others, at once eagerly claimed this quotation as evidencing the existence of the Gospel of St. John in the early part of the second century. However, the testimony as regards Basilides falls short of being unimpeachable. It can be shown that Hippolytus is apt to be loose in his method of citation, and when he asserts a "λεγει (he says)," is by no means sufficiently particular as to the subject of the verb. Thus, as he is inveighing against contemporaries of his own, men of the school of Basilides, it is possible, it has been suggested, that it is really a follower of that noted heresiarch whose words he gives us. Still, it is quite possible, on the other hand, that his words

are to be taken as they stand, and according to grammatical collocation they refer to Basilides himself.* It is curious that precisely the same uncertainty prevails in regard to the mention by Hippolytus of a reference to the Fourth Gospel by Valentinus, A.D. 140.

However, let the exact date and the authorship of the several Gospels be what they may, there is good presumptive evidence in favour of some of them (if not all) being in existence at or near the beginning of the second century. Nor is there anything to show that they then came into existence ; the probability lies in the other direction. That Matthew wrote a gospel in Aramaic, and that Mark left behind him certain *Memoirs*, are facts universally allowed. Nor has antiquity, even at a time when it did not pronounce the names of the Evangelists as known to us, ever assigned our Gospels to any other authors.

That in the case of St. John's Gospel Irenæus, Origen, and Clement, should all have been imposed upon by a forgery of a comparatively late date—one

* It may be noted that later in the same argument in which the passage occurs, the name of Basilides is again introduced as the disputant.

indeed composed within the lifetime of the first of the three—is most improbable. As a mere matter of evidence, both external and internal, it is far more likely than not that the Gospel proceeded from the pen of John himself.

CITATIONS FROM THE FATHERS

LET me adduce here a few specimens of the evidence referred to above. In the Epistle so called of Barnabas (probably A.D. 120) the words found in Matt. xx. 16 and xxii. 14, "Many are called but few chosen," are cited with the preface "it is written."^{*}

As to the still earlier writer, Ignatius, who was martyred about A.D. 110, so much of what was once attributed to him is now reckoned spurious, that he is less available for quotation than most other authors. But in passages which are generally reckoned genuine there seem to be allusions to the Gospel attributed to John, of whom Ignatius is said to have been a disciple. Thus he says, "The eternal Word is the manifestation of God;" "the

* It is well known as regards the first passage of Matthew that the words are of doubtful authority; not so as to the second.

door by which we come to the Father ;" " without Him we have not the principle of true life ;" " the food of the Christian is the bread of God, the bread of heaven, the bread of life, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, and his drink is Christ's blood, which is love incorruptible."*

The testimony of Polycarp is important, and no reasonable doubt seems to be thrown on its genuineness. Polycarp was, it is said, a hearer of the Apostle John (so Irenæus testifies, who had seen and heard Polycarp), and he was put to death at a very advanced age, a little after the middle of the second century (167). His short Epistle is

* I think it right to observe that even of these passages some are not universally allowed to be genuine. However, the Syriac version (brought to light in 1845), which exceedingly curtails all other recensions of the writings of Ignatius, but which is by no means certainly more authentic than the shorter of the two Greek forms, gives the words quoted last in the following connection : " I seek the bread of God which is the flesh of Jesus Christ ; and I seek His blood which is love incorruptible."

But some critics, not without grounds for their opinion, dispute the authenticity of every word attributed to Ignatius. In this conflict of opinion it can only be said with certainty that if the so-called Ignatius be altogether a pseudo-Ignatius, the writing at least is of an early date.

very full of quotations from various books of the New Testament. As respects the Gospels, the following appear to be citations from them: "Being mindful of what the Lord said in His teaching, Judge not, that ye be not judged; forgive, and it shall be forgiven unto you; be merciful, that ye may obtain mercy; with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. Blessed are the poor, and those that are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of God." "The Lord hath said, The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Clement, considered generally the earliest of "the Apostolic Fathers," writing perhaps within the first century, possibly, however, as late as A.D. 120, has two passages which greatly resemble passages in our Gospels, and which not a few would identify with them. "Thus the Lord Jesus spoke: Be ye merciful, that ye may obtain mercy; forgive, that it may be forgiven you; as ye do, it shall be done to you; as ye judge, so shall ye be judged; as ye are kind, so shall kindness be shown to you; with what measure ye mete, with the same it shall be meted to you." Again, "Our Lord Jesus Christ said, Woe to that man! It were

better for him that he had never been born than that he should cast a stumbling-block before one of My elect. Yea, it were better for him that a millstone should be hung [to him], and he should be sunk in the depths of the sea, than that he should cast a stumbling-block before one of My little ones."

When we come to Justin Martyr (about A.D. 150) we find in the far more extensive remains of his writings very numerous passages, which are quotations either from our Gospels, or from works no longer extant which must have greatly resembled our Gospels. The single circumstance which may be thought to militate against their claim to be citations from our Evangelists, is that in most of these instances there is some little verbal variation from our text. Now, like most of the early Fathers, Justin was not an accurate quoter, and may very well have trusted to his memory in giving us the words of Gospels and Epistles. It has been said, on the other hand, that when he quotes from the Old Testament he is much more accurate. This is true; but even in the case of the Old Testament he is by no means consistently exact in his citations; and, independently of this

fact, a good reason can be assigned for a more careful treatment of the Hebrew Scriptures, inasmuch as, unlike the sacred books of the Christians, they had long been considered authoritative. When arguing with the Jew Trypho, he had special cause to be exact; he could afford to be looser in his references when he addressed Apologies to heathen Emperors. Looseness of citation is a general practice with the early Christian writers: not one of the Apostolical Fathers, with the exception of Barnabas, names once the author he is quoting, whether of the Old or New Testament.

In the writings of Justin we meet with a continuous stream of references to the Gospel history, to the chief facts of the life of Jesus, and to the details of His teaching. Mainly these resemble most closely the notices given by our Evangelists, but occasionally they exhibit an addition to the canonical account. To give, therefore, an adequate representation of Justin's obligations to the writers of the Gospels would require considerable space, since allusions to the sacred narrative or direct citations from it are to be met with incessantly in parts of his writings. I shall content

myself with two quotations out of a vast number of such references, which may serve as a sample. In the dialogue with the Jew Trypho Justin says, speaking of the death of John the Baptist, "Wherefore also our Christ when on earth told those who said that Elias must come before Christ, Elias indeed will come, and will restore all things; but I say to you that Elias came already, and they knew him not, but did to him whatsoever they listed. And it is written, Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them concerning John the Baptist." Again, "In the memoirs, which, I say, were composed by His Apostles and those who followed them, [it is said] that sweat as drops poured down as He was praying and saying, Let this cup, if it be possible, pass away."

Irenæus, born about A.D. 140, names, as I have already said, the authors of our four present Gospels. A single link may be said, in a certain sense, to connect him with the Apostle John. There seems no reason to question his statement that the venerable Bishop of Smyrna, Polycarp, was a hearer of John; and he himself professes in his youth to have heard Polycarp. Could we look upon Irenæus as a disciple of Polycarp, his testi-

mony in regard to the Fourth Gospel would have carried very great weight with it. But his own language does not lead us to suppose that he could have had much intercourse with the aged martyr, and he must have been very youthful at the time. Polycarp, again, must have been quite a young man when St. John died—possibly 20 years of age. Polycarp, it would seem, must certainly have known “the Gospel of St. John,” and could not have failed to know who the actual author was. Would he not have imparted this knowledge to others? and is it likely that Irenæus got hold of a wrong name? Is this conceivable under the circumstances? In his short Epistle, Polycarp certainly does not quote the Gospel, although he does quote the First Epistle of John without naming it. The absence of citation in so short a treatise proves nothing conclusively, but still it should be borne in mind when this question of authorship is being considered. The date, 150, which some give to John’s Gospel, cannot possibly, I imagine, be correct. Those who so place it, are disposed to think that the author of the Gospel must have had before him the writings of Justin. Now the year 150 is almost the exact date of one

of Justin's most important treatises. A writer in whom a reflection of Justin's thoughts and expressions is traced could scarcely have produced his work till some years later. Then Irenæus, born about 140, and a contemporary of Justin for nearly thirty years, knows the Gospel of St. John, and speaks confidently of the authorship. How could it have been taken by him for the actual writing of the Apostle, had it really appeared only about the year 150 or 160? Again, the learned Origen, born twenty years after the death of Justin, entertains no doubt about the Apostolic authorship. The same may be said of Clement of Alexandria, who flourished only fifty years after the alleged date (150), and who gives the traditional account of the motives which induced the Apostle John to compose his "spiritual" Gospel.

BELIEF OF THE EARLY CHURCH

BUT the argument as to the identity of what was held by the first Christians with the contents of the present Gospels, which, after all, is what is sought to be established, by no means relies solely or mainly on the early ascertained date of the

Gospel narratives. It can be abundantly shown that whether or not the credenda of the early Christians were embodied in writings still extant of the first century, at all events the leading facts received by them were identically the same as those which have found a place in the four Gospels. These leading facts embrace the proper Divinity of Christ, His eternity as the Word and the Creator of the world, His miraculous birth, His ministry, His death, His resurrection, His appearing to His disciples and showing Himself to be no incorporeal spirit, His ascension. In the few fragments belonging to the age of the Apostolic Fathers which may safely be considered genuine, these facts are alluded to as the groundwork of the faith of the Christian Church. It is enough to recall Clement and Polycarp, the former certainly living during the lifetime of some of the Apostles, the latter personally acquainted with the Apostle John.* It must be acknowledged, however, that the earliest writers, while claiming for Christ a Divine mission and character, do not refer to any miracles as performed by Him ; but then,

* Polycarp appears to have been born about A.D. 80.

as has been said, they speak without reserve of His miraculous birth, and of His actual and attested resurrection. The omission by the Apostolic Fathers of all mention of Christ's miracles may indeed, it must equally be acknowledged, be easily explained on the ground of the nature of their writings. Those which have come down to us are of an exhortatory character, and addressed to believers: when we come at a little later period to apologetics and exposition of Christian doctrine, then we naturally have the mention of the miracles of the Master.

All things considered, there seems scarcely room for rational doubt as to what was the actual testimony of the first disciples respecting the person, works, and teaching of Christ. Upon the foundation of their testimony it is clear the edifice of the Christian Church was built up: what they believed, their hearers believed; and the universal belief of infant Christendom was embodied in records, the first written being probably the composition of some of the Apostles themselves or of certain of their companions. One great contemporary, Paul, lets us know that the faith of the Twelve was his faith. No introduction of novelties affecting the

continuity of belief can be shown from the earliest hint respecting the Christian faith and first undoubted doctrinal statements to the full development of the Christian system in the collected books of the New Testament. If, then, there is any mistake in the ordinary estimate made by Christians of the character of Christ—of His works and teaching, and of the mysteries surrounding His person—that mistake must have originated with His Twelve chosen companions: and, on this hypothesis, they have perpetuated their mistake for good part of two millenniums by the method they adopted in founding the Christian Church—they, and we must add, as being independent of them, and yet perfectly coinciding with them in his view of Jesus, the Apostle Paul.

One other point calls for notice here. There are some writers who, admiring the character of Jesus, are half disposed to allow the possibility of His mission having been Divine, but assert positively that He never made any kind of claim to a proper Divine nature. It was His followers who afterwards invented the fable of His Divinity. The groundlessness of this assertion will be seen at a glance. All that we know of Jesus is derived from

the writings which have come to us from His days, or days just subsequent. We are indebted to these writings for our knowledge alike of His character and of His words. Now, certainly, the sayings of Christ, as reported in the Gospels, imply His participation in the Divine attributes. Of course objectors are obliged to put aside arbitrarily and altogether John's Gospel: Christ's discourses there, we are told, are purely the invention of the Evangelist. But the Synoptists portray Jesus (though not with the same frequency nor explicitness) as making claim to a Divine character. What can be clearer than the intimation given in the account of Peter's confession of Jesus and of the Master's answer? (Matt. xvi.) Or what is to be said of Christ's answer to the High Priest's adjuration? (Matt. xxvi.) Or of the declarations of Jesus that He should come again in the glory of His Father to judge the world? (Matt. xvi., xix., xxv.) Or, indeed, what can we make of the saying that only the Son knoweth the Father, or of the invitation to seek and find rest in Christ? (Matt. xi.) A proposal to omit all such passages would be simply preposterous, so long as we retained any which describe to us the doings and words of Jesus, and

from which we gain our impression of His character. If a person says that from the light of nature he is convinced that Jesus could not have claimed oneness with God, he must be left, of course, with his conviction. But if he asserts that the Evangelists (even with the omission of John) do not represent Jesus as making this pretension, it is easy to show that the assertion is without foundation.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

THERE is one class of evidence to which Christian writers appeal as confirming their belief, but which Rationalists scarcely deign to regard for one moment in the light of evidence for the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, and that is the alleged anticipatory declarations of the Old Testament.

Now, merely regarded as a fact meeting us in history, the singular structure of the Old Testament merits more than a passing glance. Thus, first there is a remarkable unity of sentiment amid infinite variety of style and subject pervading the whole series of the sacred books, notwithstanding the many centuries which divide the first from the last; and next there is a continual looking forward to events in the distant future. The anticipatory,

or, as some would call it, prophetic character of the sacred writings of the Jews is so noticeable that none can miss it. Now, isolated prophecies have found a place in many religious systems, but we seek in vain for any other system at all approaching the Jewish in its never-varying tone of anticipation. The Hebrew singers and seers live in the future : even when their own troubles or their nation's encompass them, they can be jubilant, because they see the sun breaking through the clouds, although the vision may be for "length of days," according to their own expression. Further, we notice a unity, or rather a uniformity of view in the anticipations of widely-separated eras ; all lines converge to one focus, and the vista presented to the eye gives the portraiture of a kingdom to last for ever, and of a mighty, mysterious King. Indeed, upon this individual and his destinies the whole cycle of rapt utterances seems to turn ; he is the hero of the whole diversified epic : he is regarded from ever so many points of view : he is made to sustain inconsistent and contradictory characters ; but the prevailing aspect is that of his march to triumph and victory, as being the favourite of heaven.

But the nation of Jehovah is also constantly

spoken of, and is to triumph even as its King is destined to triumph : other nations are to become tributary, and all will acknowledge the sovereignty of Israel's King. So magniloquent indeed are the terms which describe the greatness and glory of Israel, that the actual condition of the people all through their history has been contrasted contemptuously with this ideal, and the latter, as failing to make good its adumbrations, has been considered false and inflated.

Again, attached to the broad lines in which are sketched the fortunes of the future King of Israel, is found the delineation of many minute particulars difficult of explanation, which seem added for some further purpose than just to give the semblance of life to an ideal portrait. Also, it should be added, that there is one very ancient prediction occurring in the earliest of the books, and said to have been known to the forefather of the people, that his future seed should be a blessing to all "the nations of the earth." A singularly ambitious prediction, all must allow, if it were a mere human one, and still more remarkable in its fulfilment !

Then, besides their legislative code and didactic

and devotional writings, the Jews, it is well known, possessed in their sacred books a most elaborate ritual, the ordinances of which strangely contrasted with the simplicity and severity of their sublime monotheistic creed. God was one, and the God of the spirits of all flesh, holy and perfect in all His ways. Yet His worshippers were subjected to endless rites and ceremonies, and never, at least in theory and with the approval of their conscience, withdrew themselves from this yoke. If in reference to the enactments to which they conformed, the thought of symbolism was present to the mind of him or those who imposed them, such symbolism does not appear to have been apprehended by the people ; there was neither key for the simple, nor esoteric initiation for the priest ; up to a certain point all was plain to all, beyond it all was mysterious : would a key ever be found ?

Now, whatever doubt may exist as to the exact time of the closing of the canon of the Old Testament, we know that the whole of the present Hebrew portion of the Bible was in the hands of the Jews many years before the birth of Jesus Christ. If there is anything in the Old Testament which looks like a foretelling of His appearing, we

are well aware that it cannot be a prophecy after the event. It is patent to all that in consequence of the prophetical writings, and also, probably, of oral tradition, the Jews had for ages before Jesus appeared nourished the hope of a Messiah ; and it is equally well known that the great question agitated among them respecting Jesus, when He began His ministry, was, whether He were the Christ or not ? Thus Christians would naturally see in the old prophecies anticipations of what they believed they had found in Jesus.

Assuredly the question of the alleged correspondence between prophecy and the matters relating to Jesus is well worth any man's sober, lengthened, and impartial investigation. It is really worthy of more than the sneer often bestowed upon it. For it is impossible to deny that a seeming resemblance of a most extraordinary character, and with endless ramifications of features of likeness, does in fact exist. We may deny, if we please, the *a priori* possibility of prophecy as of miracles in general, but it is scarcely consistent with good sense to refuse to look at evidence. When, then, we find a mysterious personage spoken of in ancient days as about to come, who should sustain manifold

characters, and, as it were, be made up of contradictions—suffering, conquering, poor, yet Lord of all, rejected, yet the head of the nation and of the heathen too, a king, a teacher, a priest among those who were accustomed to one exclusive and hereditary type of priesthood, a servant and a master, one whose seat is on God's right hand, and who is even addressed as God;* when, too, we see a vast variety of detailed circumstances having an apparent relation to some one ideal, the realisation of which seems not to have taken place in former days, at least in any adequate measure—and then, when on the other hand we are able to trace in what is known by all of Christ, added to what on strong evidence is believed concerning Him, a most complete fulfilment of the ancient mysteries, and singularly diversified announcements; when, again, the whole system of Jewish ritual can be shown to correspond exactly in the way of type to spiritual realities connected with Christ on the hypothesis of the Christian doctrine

* The LXX translation of Psalm xlv. 6, with which the Authorised Version agrees, and which is quoted in Hebrews i., appears to give by far the most natural rendering of the words.

about Him ; there seems to be in the fact of such correspondence quite enough to arouse attention, and to induce us to examine whether or not the coincidence is too perfect for chance, the connexion too well defined to be a freak of fancy.

And in conducting our examination, let us bear in mind the difficulties attending the elaboration of the Christian presentment of alleged facts (on the supposition of its being fictitious) if it were to be perfectly consistent with the obscure and wide scheme of prophecy already in existence. For not a few must have been concerned in this work of elaboration, if indeed fiction played a part in the furnishing of the plot. The founder of Christianity Himself must have first personated the character depicted in prophecy, and have endeavoured to make all His proceedings square with the plan laid down. His disciples must have carried on the dramatic undertaking, so as to surround their Master with the characterising circumstances of the ideal Christ. Then, to crown the work, each evangelist, indeed each penman of the New Testament, must have done his part in working out the design, and forming a full and consistent representation. Now, is it credible that all this could

have been done in such an excellent method of workmanship, that the result should be that no contradictory or inconsistent features are to be encountered, but that we should have a harmonious whole, corresponding with singular closeness to the mysterious portraiture of the Old Testament ? For facts will not let us for one second entertain the theory that the whole scheme of the Gospel may be the invention of a single gifted mind. We know that many contributed to its history and doctrines either as actors or writers: we have reason to believe, too, that some of these contributors were men of very simple minds, incapable of weaving in just proportion their own part of the texture of the skilfully-designed story. The difficulty involved in such a course of proceedings would be immense. Jesus must do, or be represented as doing, an amazing amount of actions, and be subjected to the influence of a vast variety of circumstances, because of the word of a prophet. He must be virgin born,* sprung from one particular town, descended from a certain progenitor,

* That the ancient Jews understood Isaiah as speaking of a virgin, and not of a young married woman, is certain; accordingly the LXX render the word ἡ παρθένος.

be conveyed in infancy to a distant land, narrowly escape massacre, and be visited by strangers from the East. Must perform certain cures, enjoy the appearance of a temporary triumph, be accosted as the Son of David, be betrayed by one of his own associates, have evil-doers for His companions in suffering, be attended with special circumstances of ignominy, and wounded by special displays of heartlessness; utter particular words at the bitterest moment of anguish, perhaps be buried by a man of substance,* rise again after a three days' sleep—all, forsooth, because prophets had spoken! How next to impossible, when many minds were engaged in making the reputed antitype agree exactly with the type, to produce a representation without a flaw! Then what a bold, and, we must add, successful attempt on the part of the unknown writer who in the Epistle to the Hebrews spiritualises the ceremonial ordinances of the old Law, to interpret their enigmas by a detailed reference to the experience and proceedings of Christ! Whatever may be thought of the writer's idea, the consistency and coherency of the parallelism can-

* According to the interpretation given to Isaiah liii. 9, "with the rich (man) in his death."

not be denied. Certainly the Christian scheme, taken as a whole, if it be not the simple evolution of a Divinely-adjusted plan of making known the highest truth, is a marvel of human ingenuity, or else of the gratuitous gathering together of verisimilitudes.

Further, if Prophecy be regarded as simply the expression of either national or individual aspiration, or else as the production of political sagacity and foresight projecting themselves into the current of probable events in the future, then we must maintain that those minds which sketched the far distant destinies of the Jewish people were either exceptionally astute or else most singularly favoured by good luck in the uncertain task of fortune-telling. For although it might not be anything very remarkable for a law-giver or moralist to threaten a people in general terms with calamities in case his injunctions were disregarded (as the Spartan Lycurgus may have done), and for future history in some degree to justify his denunciations by exhibiting a partial accomplishment of them, yet the correspondence between the large bulk of detailed predictions concerning rebellious Israel and the past and present actual condition of

the nation is something too remarkable to admit of easy explanation from the ordinary principles of human vaticination. We all regard the Jews as occupying a unique position in the world, a people dispersed, and yet kept separate from other nations in a degree which has attracted comment from all quarters, a people esteeming themselves in a peculiar sense "the people of God," a people, again, able to produce national records, which in ages long anterior predicted exactly the singular fortunes which have subsequently befallen them. Then, further, the Jewish seers, not content with musing over the future of their own race, and delineating in a succession of pictorial representations the glorious Deliverer who was to save the people from sin as well as from misfortune, also sing pæans over the fall of their numerous oppressors. Well, this may be considered natural. Bards and Sibyls have elsewhere done the same thing. But it is scarcely in accordance with ordinary oracular utterances, that so distinct an intimation should have been given of the coming fall of various powerful empires either at the zenith of their glory or even before that zenith was reached, as we find in the pages of the Hebrew prophets.

The dexterity of the Delphian oracle, for instance, was shown in the studied obscurity of its few words, and in their capability of allowing opposite interpretations. Indeed, so strikingly like the event have been many of the announcements of Hebrew prophecy, that criticism has taken considerable pains in attempting to show that all such predictions were delivered after the events foretold, or else on the eve of their accomplishment; but hitherto the endeavour has not met with much success. In order to keep up its theory that "prophecy," in the sense of prediction, must not be, modern criticism has had to cut into shreds the existing prophetic books, and to give large sections to imaginary late authors, of whom Jewish tradition, fruitful as it is in tales of marvel and in details true and untrue, knows absolutely nothing.*

* Writers now talk confidently of the "Pseudo" or "Deutero" Isaiah, as though it were an ascertained fact that a second author wrote the latter part of the great book of the prophecy of Isaiah. Nothing can be more contrary to truth. This imaginary personage sprang up only just 100 years ago in the brain of the German Koppe. There is nothing whatever to support the theory of a "second Isaiah," save the arbitrary dictum that prophecy can in no case be of such a nature as involves absolute prediction or superhuman pre-science. As to internal evidence, the argument based on

This labour of dividing and remodelling has been found hard and unsatisfactory ; and after all, no solvent which critical skill can supply will ever, it is felt, be able to disintegrate the predictions respecting "the latter days" of the Jewish nation, and the coming and the character of the Jewish Messiah. Again, it is an acknowledged fact that "the seed of Abraham" gave to the world the greatest of boons—how marvellous that this should have been predicted centuries before the rise of Christianity.

PERMANENCY OF CHRISTIANITY

THERE is a striking and seemingly distinctive feature in the Christian religion which deserves

difference of style, as distinguished from subject-matter, fails completely, whilst a line of reasoning taking its premises from the unity of design, would be altogether in favour of the old-established opinion about the prophet. As to external evidence, so far as I know, none is so much as claimed by the supporters of the popular modern view, which would "saw asunder" the written Isaiah, even as kingly cruelty, according to the rabbinical tradition, performed the same act of division on the living Isaiah. Had a late prophet given utterance to all the remarkable sayings contained in Isaiah xl.—lxvi., how could his name have possibly slipped out of the memory and records of the Jews?

consideration when its claims to the character of a supernatural Revelation are being canvassed, and that is the imperishable quality of its doctrine as reflected and embodied in the belief and religious habits of its adherents. In this it appears to differ from the rest of the great world religions. All the chief religious systems of the East, for example, are known to have deteriorated to an incredible extent; so much so that it has become no easy task to prove that at any time they possessed any pure moral teaching, or that their sacred books had at least an admixture of noble sentiments. So with the old religions of Greece and Rome, whatever was elevating in them had to be sought in the early ages of the national history, and to be separated from the foul incrustations of succeeding times. These religions never reformed themselves. We know well what the worship of the gods had become at the time when St. Paul was writing his Epistles. To this state of things the Christian religion presents a contrast. Christianity produces as its authoritative documents those which it exhibited more than seventeen centuries ago, unenlarged and unaltered, while Christians may fearlessly challenge for the best modern represen-

tatives of the belief, comparison with the earliest standard-bearers of the Cross. Nor is it too much to say, in spite of certain appearances to the contrary, that the pristine genius of the Faith, unchanged in feature and spirit, pervades still Christian literature. It is not to be denied for a moment that accretions have gathered round the original body of belief in this or that age or country. But that such disfiguring accretions were not the native growth of the system, but fastened themselves upon it from without, in spite of the protest supplied by its own sacred writings, is proved by the fact that the religion has shown itself able to cast off all such disfigurements and perversions of its creed, and is to be found at the present day identically the same religion as it was at the first, exhibiting the same title deeds, and in respect of belief and practice marking its professor with precisely the same stamp as distinguished the early Christian from his heathen neighbour. In fact, Christianity appears to possess an innate vitality, and to be capable of reproducing itself indefinitely in all its original integrity. This characteristic may be thought to furnish an argument of no inconsiderable weight in favour of its supernatural origin.

INSPIRATION

It has been consonant with the plan I had marked out for myself, to speak hitherto of the Canonical Books as of any other books which claim to be veracious. But it must not be overlooked that, if the Christian view of them be the right one, their claim on our acceptance is altogether different both in kind and degree from that of other edifying compositions. For to the mind of the Christian believer they come under the category of "Holy Scripture;" and that character which the New Testament itself attributes to the writings of the Old Testament is freely assigned to the whole sacred volume, namely, of being the word or speech of God. According to this view, it is held that the several writers were supernaturally endowed and directed, so that whilst each author was, in a general way, suffered to preserve his individual peculiarities of view or of expression, a certain superintendence was exercised over him, the exact nature and limits of which it is impossible to define. Such special enlightenment, if a reality, would render futile a good deal of the criticism which tells us authoritatively, and independently of mere peculiarities of style, how such

or such an author must have written, or how in this or that way it was impossible that the same could have written. When the Spirit of God, subordinating to His own purposes the faculties of men, and speaking by Divinely illuminated understandings, is recognised as the informing Mind of Scripture, questions respecting the outward clothing of the inner sense of the Word are made to retreat very much into the background. The Christian, be he esteemed either fanatic or sober-minded, believes that God addresses him in the Bible, and that whatever purely human feelings may be enshrined, or whatever residuum of human imperfection may lurk in the volume, it is practically an infallible guide in its own proper sphere of instruction. If asked, "On what does he base his 'singular' or 'superstitious' opinion about the Scriptures?" he will reply, "On the statements found in certain passages of Scripture respecting other parts of the sacred volume." Thus, in an Epistle claiming to come from St. Paul, the whole collection of Old Testament writings is said to be Divinely inspired ;* in an Epistle bearing the name

* If the authenticity of the Epistles to Timothy be questioned, we may refer to the Epistles to the Galatians, where

of Peter, the ancient writers are said to have been "moved," or "borne forward" by the Spirit of God ; the Evangelists consider the Old Testament God's word ; Christ Himself is represented by the Evangelists as taking the same view. Then to the believer in the Christian revelation it would be a thing absolutely incongruous to hold the inspiration of the Old Testament and to deny that of the New. For although, with the exception of the author of the Book of the Revelation, he may not find the several writers of the New Testament claiming for themselves Divine guidance (as neither is such claim advanced by the ancient Psalmists), yet he does find the promise of special guidance given to the leaders of the Church for the benefit of those who should be taught by them, and is prepared accordingly to accept as a Divine gift, and as the virtual expression of God's Mind, that particular deposit of the faith which has come to be marked out, providentially he believes, as "the New Testament."* If, on good authority, he is told that a

the inspiration of the Old Testament is inferentially, but most distinctly, indicated.

* At a very early period we find the highest authority attributed by Christians to the Apostolic writings. Thus Clement (about A.D. 100) speaks, "Take up the Epistle of

verse, as in 1 John v., or several successive verses, as in Mark xvi., or in John viii., or even a whole Epistle, as 2 Peter, must be considered spurious, or of doubtful genuineness, he is not greatly disturbed, being aware that it is quite possible that additions may have been made to the authentic substance of the authoritative text. His creed does not rest on one or two isolated passages, but on the broad statements which run through the whole texture of the collected writings, and give them their characteristic unity.

INTERNAL TESTIMONY

THAT truth should by any innate power apart from the demonstration of exact reason be able to prove itself truth to him who holds it, has often been pronounced to be a proposition of no value whatever, a mere dream of the imagination. For it may be argued, one man's persuasion cannot, on the simple ground of its being his persuasion, be shown to be better than another man's, except so far as the former may be thought to have a higher intelligence and a

the blessed Apostle Paul. Truly he wrote to you spiritually," &c.


sounder judgment than the latter. An objective proof in favour of the truth of any system is the only kind of proof which carries weight with it. So we are often told. And yet it does not seem inconceivable that the highest kind of truth, viz., that which addresses itself to the highest part of our nature, our moral sense and practical faculties, should be able to attest its real character to the man who grasps it, by presenting a conformity to his ideal of fitness and to the dictates of his conscience. Even if not absolutely demonstrated in this way, such truth might, at least (it is thought by some), be rendered certain to his mind. In which case that truth which appeals to the moral sense, or what in an inferior sense may be called a revelation, might in the event of drawing to itself an immediate and glad assent of the understanding and will, be said with no apparent impropriety to be its own proof. Certainly we treat as axioms many isolated moral maxims—they want no proof of their correctness over and above their bare enunciation. Now, it has frequently been argued by professors of the Christian faith, that the Christian Revelation, taken in the terms

in which it is expressed in the Scriptures, has this self-evidencing quality, that when it has been received *bond fide* alike by the understanding and the practical faculties, it conveys an irresistible conviction of its truth, and solves the question as to its being a veritable light by shining. If there be such a power in a Revelation given from heaven, and if the Christian scheme be such a Revelation, at all events this kind of proof must necessarily be confined to those who, on grounds sufficient to satisfy their reason, have embraced the scheme: it can be nothing to outsiders. Yet even by unbiassed disbelievers, the Christian writings may be thought to plead powerfully for an attentive hearing of their claim of containing a revelation, by reason of a species of a rare and unearthly spiritual beauty.

It is affirmed that in all parts of the New Testament (as in the devotional portions of the Old) there are passages which "find out"* a man, and which speak to his inward ear as with a voice which he feels to be something beyond a human voice. While the reality of this may be questioned, there can be little question of the

* Coleridge.

marvellous nature of the thoughts presented in numerous passages of Paul's writings, having as their ground-work and motive-power the pre-supposed facts of the death, rising, and ascension of Jesus. Whether true or not as to their dogmatic statements, these noble unearthly utterances, having evidently their spring in a fervent love to God and man, can nowhere be paralleled outside the circle of Christian literature. Neither can be questioned the practical effect produced very frequently by the Christian writings. This is a matter of daily observation. A man is brought from a state of mental depression and sorrow to a state of peace and hope by his own perusal, or by the conveyance to his apprehension by some other, of a certain portion of the Scriptures. The change is in many cases very great, and not unfrequently rapid. How is this psychological fact to be explained? Whatever explanation we are disposed to give, we must allow that a certain great power resides in those alleged truths which are the soul of the Bible. For exactly in the same way as upon the administration of certain drugs, known and powerful effects manifest themselves in the cor-



poreal frame, these strongly marked consequences of a spiritual nature are found to ensue on the heart's reception of the sayings of the Scripture. We know of no other system of belief which possesses in anything like an equal degree the same sanative influence.

Let the volume accounted sacred by Christians be compared with the sacred books of any other religion, and what an immeasurable distance separates them. It is true the knowledge of even the learned (with the exception, perhaps, of a very limited circle of Orientalists) respecting the earliest and purest books of the Brahminical religion is far from perfect ; still, what is known of the Vêdas as existing in their pristine form, and is now accessible to ordinary readers, gives us sufficient data for passing some kind of judgment upon them. And the general verdict of such as have a right to speak on the subject pronounces them, in spite of an occasional fine moral sentiment and of some beauty of diction, to be on the whole jejune and puerile, and contributing but little to elevation of mind. Whether the further information which is likely before long to be given us about these ancient books

will at all modify our present impression, remains to be seen.

We may next think of the teaching of Confucius: what shall be said of it, as compared with the sublime doctrines of even the Old Testament respecting the oneness and spirituality of God, and the unfolding of His holy will—Confucius, who taught that nothing beyond the visible world was worth a wise man's inquiry? As to the Koran, its circle of religious ideas is not sufficiently original to cite it for the purpose of comparison: enough to say that where it goes beyond its borrowed materials, it betrays poverty of thought and absence of elevation of spirit.

Again, glorious as was the inspiration of Plato, in point of pure religious sentiment how far do his or his master's noblest sayings fall short of the high-toned spiritualised feeling which breathes throughout the Hebrew Book of Psalms and other parts of the Old Testament, and which tells of a conscious communion of man with a Higher Power! Devout, righteous, and noble as we may deem Socrates to have been, the position he occupied as to the things of God did not, and could not, we imagine, allow him to express sentiments ap-

proaching at all the purity and spirituality of view discoverable in the Songs of David. In the same way, beautiful as was the close of the life of the great Athenian sage, it cannot be compared for one moment with the awful solemnity of the death of the Founder of Christianity, who had given repeated previous intimations to those around Him of His full purpose to lay down His life for the good of men.

Indeed, it is not to be denied that "the sublime teaching of Jesus" and the grandeur of "rational Christianity" are spoken of more than respectfully—enthusiastically, we may say—by those who do not acknowledge a revelation. But it must be said to such admirers of the noble and good, "Perhaps you are scarcely aware of how much you deprive the Christian system when you abstract the supernatural element." Far from merely paring away a few excrescences in the shape of portents of doubtful utility or moral beauty, the withdrawal of the wonders of Christianity involves the collapse and ruin of the whole scheme. For the grand motive force which has achieved the past triumphs of the Christian faith is at once paralysed. The central fact of the Revelation is

the display of Divine love in God's giving His beloved Son to men, in order to win them to Himself, and thus to secure their happiness. It has been found by experience that on the practical reception of this doctrine, the human heart has in myriads of instances given itself freely to God to do all that duty requires. The display of free love has generated free love. Now reduce Jesus to the level of a mere teacher of men—the most excellent, indisputably, who has ever taught both by precept and a noble life—and at once the leading inducement to gratitude has disappeared. It was a gracious act of God, let us say, to send Socrates, and Marcus Aurelius, and an act more beneficent to send the noblest of men, Jesus: but if this be now discovered to be all, why, the power of Christianity, which has quickened the spiritual life of men, will shrivel up, and decay, and give place, perhaps, to other and still higher forms of faith.

It is tolerably certain that, in general, unbelievers in Revelation have a wholly inadequate conception of what they owe to the Gospel for their system of ethics and religion. In truth, to the influence of the Christian faith may be traced by impartial

investigators, very much of that improvement on the ethical system of the old philosophies which many modern moralists fancy that they have worked out for themselves independently of influence from without.* Meanwhile it would be no easy matter for those who speak somewhat vaguely of the sublime teaching of Christ, to afford any criterion enabling us to distinguish between the actual teaching of the Master and the subsequent additions made by His followers—if at least the genuineness of the Christian documents be denied, and John's Gospel in particular be treated as a mythical composition.†

* It is to be remembered that nearly all modern English and American leaders of free thought were born of Christian parents—the great majority having actually themselves been Christians at one time. The veteran leader of English Theism (if Mr. F. W. Newman may be so termed) was once a Christian Missionary, and with the same devotedness and ability as distinguished Henry Martyn laboured in the same land of the east.

† Thus Strauss warns us—"A Being with distinct features, capable of affording a definite conception, is only to be found in the Christ of faith, of legend, and there, of course, only by the votary who is willing to take into the bargain all the impossibilities, all the contradictions contained in the history. The Jesus of history, of science, is only a problem: but a

In dissecting even a Synoptical Gospel, who can be taken as a safe guide as to what may be considered veracious, and what the adornment of fancy, since each man's critical faculty will probably lead him in a direction slightly different from that taken by each fellow-expositor? Indeed, in this matter has not the adage been abundantly verified, "*Quot homines, tot sententiæ*"?

OBJECTIONS

LET a few popular objections to the Christian scheme be now very briefly noticed.

1. The Fall of Man.—Christian theology, if it is true to its professed principle of receiving what is certainly and dogmatically stated in Scripture, must acknowledge the doctrine of a decline on the part of the human race from an original state of innocence. That this original state was characterised by tried excellence or by mature knowledge, he is in no way bound to hold. On the contrary, it may have been a condition of simple ignorance of moral evil. But that an introduction of evil into man's moral nature came about, and that the

problem cannot be an object of worship or a pattern by which to shape our lives."

taint was capable of transmission, and has, in fact, been transmitted to posterity, is certainly a dogma of Revelation. Now is it, as is often declared, an incredible dogma? Let us deal with acknowledged facts of human nature. Man's moral constitution is imperfect. No one disputes this statement: our moral tendencies, when left to themselves, are assuredly not in the direction of good. Mr. Mill, for instance, tells us that the primitive man has no natural virtues, and that all virtues are acquisitions. Other moralists give similar testimony. Either, then, mankind must have been created, or first sprang into being, with a nature inclined to evil, or else some mysterious blight must have subsequently passed over the race. Is the latter alternative, presented to us by the Bible, more difficult to accept than the former? Can any one advance a more probable explanation of our anomalous moral condition than the Apostle Paul's?

There is a philosophy of the present day which resolves moral obliquity into ignorance, and holds that human nature has a tendency by a natural selection of moral good to free itself from evil of every kind. This theory is contradicted by the

facts of the world. Great intellectual development and the highest civilisation have been known to coexist with very great corruption of manners.

2. The State of the Heathen, or of Non-recipients of the Gospel.—An objection has sometimes been raised to the very terms of the Gospel, as being an incredible Revelation, on the score of the condemnation pronounced on those who have not heard it. It is asserted that the Gospel dooms to destruction such as have had no opportunity of making themselves acquainted with its promises and requirements. But on a fair interpretation of the real sentiments of the New Testament this will be found not to be the case. Silence is in fact preserved respecting those to whom the message, said to be from heaven, does not come ; wilful rejection of the message is alone threatened.

3. Fewness of the Recipients of the Gospel.—This furnishes to disbelievers a favourite argument, and one not destitute of plausibility. It is asked, "If God did indeed impart a Revelation of His will, is it conceivable that the boon should be confined to a few, since it is a boon" (it is added) "not extending simply, in the judgment of Christians, over a few years, or imparting a certain amount of

present comforts, but one which promises eternal life?" Not disbelievers only, but Christians as well, feel the difficulty involved in this objection. At the same time those who believe in the existence of a Supreme Being and attribute to Him all moral perfections, will freely acknowledge that a finite mind can be no fit judge of His ways, and must be wholly at a loss to conjecture beforehand how He is likely to act. The Christian Revelation speaks of the greatest possible boon having been bestowed on all men through the Son of God. Further, it tells us of a future state of existence. How all men can be individually benefited by the gift of which, in this life, many have not heard, is not told us. The Revelation does not profess to clear up all mysteries: at the most it removes or diminishes difficulties which might impede our practice; it habitually turns away from mere speculative points; it addresses itself in a practical manner to those whom it reaches; it tells a man nothing about his neighbour. It is argued by a learned Apologist of the seventeenth century that the Gospel declares that "God hath given to every man, by Christ, a measure of saving, sufficient, and supernatural light and grace." It

by no means follows that benefits won for man by a certain "Divine economy" according to the Scriptural scheme must be restricted to such as have a present and precise knowledge of the marvels of the Divine procedure. Further, we must be careful not to exaggerate the fewness of the recipients of Christianity. One who writes against the belief has lately given us 360 millions as the number of its adherents, whilst he classes 600 millions under other creeds.

Again, to holders of a Theistic Creed, it may be an argument of weight to show (as may easily be done) that exactly the same sort of difficulties involved in the giving of a Revelation, and in much of the contents of the Christian Revelation as matters of faith to be accepted, is involved in the belief of a Providential Government of the world. Indeed this argument in its general bearing is allowed by Mr. Mill, who, in view of the latter difficulties, draws the inference that the Governor of the world, if there be one and He be benevolent (as we have reason for thinking), cannot possess unlimited power.

4. Miracles as the ground of a General Objection.—Apart from the question of the abstract

possibility of miraculous occurrences, it is objected generally to the Christian Revelation that it is encumbered with prodigies, which fact, it is insinuated, reduces its historical basis to the level of ordinary fictitious representations. Without attempting to examine again the credibility of the particular miracles of the Gospel history, suffice it to say that if the contents of the Christian doctrine be true, miracles are not only conceivable, but are rendered indispensable. A Divine Revelation is a miracle in itself, and its conveyance to man must be attended with supernatural signs. If Christ was more than man, it was to be expected that His acts should display a more than human power. There is no inconsistency, but the reverse, in the union of the scheme propounded by Christianity with miraculous occurrences. The Gospel miracles are not gratuitous and unmeaning wonders: they have an assigned place in the general plan of the dispensation, and assist in developing the Revelation of the Divine will. Thus the miracles which Christ wrought illustrate, as signs, His healing, saving power, and in their capacity of giving this assurance, speak to the heart.

It is, therefore, a short-sighted policy on the part of defenders of Christianity either to deny, with Schleiermacher, the importance of the Christian miracles, or to attempt to explain them away. We do not see how Christianity could be what it declares itself to be without what some would call the garniture of miracles; they are the sign-manual of the Revealer of secrets. It is true, we have the assertion of unbelievers that at the present day the miracles, instead of being valuable vouchers for the truth which at one time they were supposed to support, are now felt to be a huge hindrance and an adverse force. Not at all. There is a clear congruity between the signs and the alleged character and position of Christ: and then the wonderful things which He did enforce His teaching, and even still confirm men's faith in Him. If we had no signs described to us, we should then begin to ask for them. The Gospel history of the miracles presents at all events a consistent and intelligent account. Christ is described as impressing His immediate followers with a sense of His Divine power, and then sends them forth as witnesses to convince the world by their simple and truthful testimony. And, as a fact in the world's annals,

their testimony was received, and has ever since been received, in spite of its being encumbered (some would say) with the dead weight of miracles. We may call it strange, but still it appears to be an undeniable matter of fact, that even at the present remote day the record of the signs which Jesus did conduces to the belief that He was the Christ.

Lastly, in connection with Miracles I would observe that the Apostle Paul distinctly claims the power of working them for himself and for certain of his converts. So far, we may be said to have the testimony of an eye-witness (and that no ordinary one) in support of "signs, wonders, and mighty deeds."

5. Good and Evil Spirits.—That such mysterious beings exist is certainly implied throughout the whole of Scripture, and plainly declared in not a few passages. Many regard a belief in the existence of such beings, especially of evil spirits, as a superstition, and make the Scriptural assertions respecting them a ground for impugning the trustworthiness of the record. But no one can disprove the veracity of the Biblical statement: there is no *a priori* reason why such beings should not exist. What is known, or thought to be known, respecting them is derived simply from Revelation: it is

not a matter that we can bring to any test. It has sometimes been loosely asserted that the Jews gained, not very early in their history, the notion of spirits, good and evil, from the Persians or other Oriental nations. This is certainly incorrect so far as the origin of the notion is concerned, since the existence of an Evil Spirit and of Angels was known to the author of the first of the Hebrew books, whether that author be Moses, or some other early writer. The conception of a Devil has often been considered preposterous, and certainly the grotesque caricature which men's idle fancies have invented of the Scriptural Satan has done much to bring the notion of the existence of evil spirits into disrepute. It seems impossible, however, to assign any good reason why, if evil men exist—and it is confessedly out of our power to define any limit beyond which a proficient in wickedness cannot advance—evil spirits should not exist as well.*

6. Eternal Punishment.—This dogma has been a fruitful source of objections to the Christian

* A late writer bestows the epithet "surprising" on the reasoning of Dr. Newman, when he states that we may arrive at the notion of God's existence through the study of Nature,

scheme. It is impossible to deny that Christian writers have done much to strengthen this particular head of objection. Not content to abide simply by the few solemn sentences of Scripture on the subject of the future destiny of impenitent evil-doers, they have set forth representations of all kinds and modes of never-ending torment—which imaginings may be said to have culminated in the materialistic and terrific conceptions of the great Italian poet of the Middle Ages. Now, that Christ and His Apostles did speak (or are represented in the Bible as having spoken) of an endless retribution as about to visit wicked men cannot be disputed ; it is evident, too, that the notion of annihilation has to be excluded from the terms of their denunciations, unless we would do consider-

but we can know of the existence of Evil Spirits only by means of Revelation. There appears to be no incorrectness or strangeness in that statement. The writer in question would certainly allow that nothing apart from a Revelation can inform us concerning Angels, whether good or bad. On the other hand, in the absence of a direct Revelation, Nature has taught the countless tribes of the human race that God exists. "The things that are made" have ever indicated "invisible things, even the eternal power and Godhead" of the Deity.

able violence to the words ascribed to them. It is to be remembered that in the age of Jesus the Jews were already familiarised with the notion of the endless punishment of the conscious subject in Gehenna, as we know from Josephus and other writers ; so that when Christ spoke of "the place of torment," and used the term "everlasting" in reference to its penalties, He must have wished His hearers to understand Him as speaking of a continued and indestructible existence in the prison-house. Thus much seems clear. But of the precise nature of the dread punishment a very faint conception is conveyed by the language, mainly figurative, of the Scripture concerning it. Still, the appalling statement remains in its integrity and cannot be softened down.

But let us survey the fearful question on all sides. The case is supposed to be before us of men who, through a persistence in evil all their life through, have effectually stifled the good principle within them, and die as they have lived. If we have to think of such at all, what are we to deem of them ? Some persons would suggest, "there may be an utter extinction of them, fulfilling literally the ancient words, 'Into smoke shall they consume

away.'” But neither philosophy with its probabilities, nor Scripture with its voice of authority, invites us to contemplate this as the ultimate fate of any human spirit. Others, assured of the immortality of the principle within us all, which provides us with a conscience and a moral nature, and enables us to weave thoughts only less than infinite in their variety and compass, imagine a process of spiritual enlightenment and amelioration in another state of existence for those whose course in this world has been confessed by a *vie manquée*. There may be punishment indeed, but it will be loving chastisement which aims at, and triumphantly effects at last, the reformation and blessedness of those who once were disobedient. No wonder that such a contemplation has fired the imagination of loving souls in all ages of the world. If only evil could be thus subdued, and good, or the Lord of good, reign over all! But what if such a consummation should involve moral impossibilities? How little can we tell! How utterly unable are we to conceive a process in the future which, with the free consent of the will, is to change a nature which has steadily resisted all good influences through a lifetime, and has quitted this present

world burdened with remorse and with hatred of the good ! Of course, in one sense, all things are possible with the Omnipotent ; but that, consistently with Eternal Right and Eternal Love, He can restore to their forfeited estate those whose hearts successfully resisted all His former pleadings, and that from such hearts love and humble trust can be finally drawn, we are not in a position to assert positively. Certainly we can picture to ourselves no moral machinery of equal efficacy with that display of Divine love in the Gospel, which in many cases has been both recognised and despised. Are we really qualified to say that the teaching which assigns to the impenitent man an ever-continuing state of impenitence, and thus sentences him to carry an eternal hell within him, must be erroneous ?

And on the other hand, true though it be that Scripture holds out no prospect of a restoration to those miserable ones who have let evil triumph over them completely, but pronounces upon them their merited sentence of condemnation, are we bound to the affirmation that God cannot have any secret counsel of His own, unimaginable by us, and not fitting at the present time to be revealed, according to which the seemingly impossible may

become possible, and a universal restitution may be accomplished? We can discover, indeed, in Scripture no explicit statement to justify such an anticipation; nor, if we hold that we have in Scripture a Divine revelation, shall we hesitate to believe that it was the part of wisdom to pronounce simply over the wicked the sentence which justice demands, "let the wicked and miserable be wicked and miserable still."

Regarded from any point of view, there may well be true mercy in making the evil-minded see what is the natural consequence of their ways—misery, and only misery, hopeless and endless—and in there leaving a blank. It may be Divine wisdom which speaks of a coming destruction for the warning of evildoers; it may be human unwisdom which would attempt to draw away the veil which hides the future, and to scan what at present it is not given us to behold. Even if we give the reins to our imagination, and try with easy presumption to devise an improvement on the existing terms of the Gospel, we shall be at a loss to know how to invent different conditions consistent at the same time with the attitude and tone assumed by the Gospel. This, we all know, professes to be a

message of amnesty proceeding from the majesty of heaven, and displaying inconceivable love on the part of God. If reasonable creatures are addressed by a Creator in the accents adopted throughout the Gospel, the admixture of threatening with entreaty and invitation appears to be necessitated. And what, practically, would be the force of affixing any penalty to the rejection of the message of God's love, if it were intimated, not obscurely, that in the end there would be some way of counteracting the evil consequences of such refusal? No: the Gospel, to be consistent, appears to require the absence of any clear intimation of a scheme of universal restitution. We may almost venture to say that it would have partially defeated its own objects, had it proclaimed that in the end all should be well for the vicious equally with the virtuous. Vice must simply be left face to face with the anger of a God who changeth not. To extend the time for amendment by introducing the hope of some future exercise of special grace under changed conditions of existence (were such exercise possible), would merely stimulate man's natural tendency to put off painful processes to a convenient season. Death, then, is simply said to be

“the wages of sin;” no life from that death is promised the impenitent. So on the first disobedience death was awarded; but a Deliverer was then found. We know no more. The fact is, we must even be content with imperfect knowledge and fragmentary views of truth. To see clearly, and to dig to the roots of things and to make our circle of perception complete in the matters of the highest concern, is not as yet our privilege. We can but examine, and weigh probabilities, and array one set of evidence against another, and strike a balance. Thus we may hope to gain inferences of a certain value and compass, but full knowledge will still be denied us.

CLAIMS OF RIVAL CREEDS

IN considering the claims Christianity may seem to have upon our acceptance of its doctrines, we must take a full and broad view of the evidence it presents, and, having endeavoured fairly to estimate the cumulative weight of all that can be alleged in its favour, then give in turn to counter testimony its due, but not an overdue, value. Parting with Christianity, we part, every one confesses, with all hope of attaining certainty of positive

belief.* Still, it may be objected, I am aware, that it was after all a semblance of certainty, and only a semblance, which dazzled and fascinated our eyes, when we were undoubting disciples of Christ. But let us at least ask, To what are we committed, if we have to quit our old moorings, and choose a new faith? "*Quem sequimur? quove ise jubes? ubi ponēse sedes?*" What system shall we adopt of the many which invite our confidence? Under the banner of what leader of thought shall we range ourselves? Shall we take as our guide Mr. Mill, assuredly one of the most conclusive of modern reasoners, and learn of him that we cannot be sure that there is a God, and that man's best religion is the cultivation of the highest morality? Or will that distinguished Professor help us, in

* This may be safely affirmed—that giving up historical Christianity, we occupy a position which presents points of attack more easy to carry on the part of assailants than we find them to defend. As a matter of fact, generally one point of belief and then another is yielded. There seems to be for most wanderers from a first belief no unshifting standing ground between historical Christianity and philosophical Scepticism, although some manage to secure a footing in the wide intervening space, and remain fixed to the end to some definite spot.

his own scientific line so eminent, but whose creed appears to vary with the state of his feelings? Or will the able writer who has lately done his best to enlighten us as to Supernatural Religion, give us more effectual aid? And then, *when* are we to take him for our Mentor? As we find him at the commencement of his literary labours, or on their completion? Are we to receive the conception of an active overruling God, of One who cares for us, according to one part of his teaching, or are we to regard the Deity as an Impersonal Influence, as another portion of his treatise seems to teach? * Or shall we apply to Spiritualism,

* There appears to be a curious inconsistency in the work to which allusion is here made (*Supernatural Religion*), on the subject of the nature of God. In Part I., Chap. iii. (2nd Edit.) the assumption of a Personal Deity is condemned, and unless the author is playing with his readers (for which supposition no grounds whatever are given) he must be considered an opponent of the belief in a Personal God. On the other hand, in Part II. Chap. iii., Conclusions, he as evidently concedes this belief by adopting the language of pure Theism and speaking (it may be unconsciously) of God as having personal relations with us. Thus he observes, "We rise to high conceptions of an infinitely wise and beneficent Being, hidden from our finite minds, it is true, in the impenetrable glory of Divinity, but whose laws of wondrous comprehensiveness and perfection we ever per-

with its fair-sounding pretensions? Or shall we give the preference to one or other section of Theism, and then to which of them? Little indeed does any one of the forms of Theism offer in the way of positive, satisfying truth. That there is a God and Father of us all—that virtue is happiness—that prayer is answered—that man is destined to live again—these cardinal verities certain Theists enunciate, it is true; but little more have they to propound authoritatively than these elementary dogmas and their legitimate inferences. We ask, “Is this all given to man below to satisfy his spiritual longings?” Involved in utter uncertainty, perplexed by the jarring voices of our several prophets, and threatened with more than one perfectly new basis for the erection thereon

ceive in operation around us. We recognise that the Being who regulates the Universe is without variableness. We live under the beneficent government of an Omnipresent God. We shall recognise in the highest sense that God is ever with us, that His good Providence controls our slightest actions.” How to reconcile this language with previous statements is beyond my power, since it is certain that a Supreme Being who regulates the Universe and controls men by the exercise of His will, possesses personality. I was not aware, when I wrote this note, that my remark had been anticipated, as I now find to be the case.

of primary moral principles, we at last inquire eagerly, "Is it possible that that God whom most of our philosophers acknowledge in some sort may after all have given us a Revelation?" If an unveiling of truth or even of a portion of heart-satisfying truth has been effected, and we can meet with the truth as made known, what an unspeakably blessed rest to the seeking spirit, weary and tossed to and fro! Certainly we should then exclaim, "Nassi mihi parta quies, omnis que in limine portus." And believing with all devout Theists that we have a God and Father whose love toward us is boundless, is it too much to hope that He may have been willing to give to His children a distinct unfolding of His will?

Assuredly such a hope appears to be more reasonable than the following sentiment, supplied by a Theistical writer: the idea of Revelation is "repulsive to our better instincts," and contrasts most unfavourably "with the grandeur and invariability of the order of Nature." Where progress is deemed a necessity in human development, and, consequently, Revelation is thought to be *de trop*, there the bearings of the fact of moral evil are, I must think, overlooked or misapprehended.

CONCLUSION

To extract some definite conclusions from a review of the foregoing remarks.

There appears to be little to allure a man who may be craving for rest for his anxiously inquiring spirit in the arid speculations of the various forms of Atheism, Scepticism, and Pantheism. Abundant exercise will be found in the intricacies of any one of these philosophies for intellectual ingenuity; but inasmuch as spirit seeks companionship with spirit, and would fain find Infinite Spirit and at the same time Personal sympathetic Spirit, a man whose higher nature is athirst will not long be content, in ordinary cases, with exertations of thought dealing solely with abstractions. "Show me Thy face," his soul cries within him urgently, if wildly and ignorantly.

One of the best comments on the fruitlessness of such abstract reasonings is the fact previously adduced, of the best of our modern logicians and one of the foremost of our philosophers being unable to find out God by his irrefragable method of argumentation, and yet being forced to the conclusion that very likely there might be a God. An unsatisfactory uncertainty indeed for an emi-

nently wise man to be landed in! We might suggest a further probability: if it is likely that there is a God, it is also likely that God is knowable.

But the seeker after God, supposing him to exercise an independent judgment, may possibly pause long at the point where diverge the two pathways of credenda, the Theistical and the Christian. It must ever be exceedingly difficult, where the best thoughts and affections have been already engaged by the one or the other system of belief, to bring an impartial mind to the investigation of the matter in dispute. All we can do, when committed to a creed by prepossession, is to attempt to give its due weight to each argument which meets us in our inquiries, whether adverse to our side or favourable. It is something here to be able to agree all round as to what constitutes a crucial test—viz., the point of Miracles. "Prove your Miracles," it is said on the one side, "and we allow your Revelation." "Prove our Miracles to be impossible or untrue," it is rejoined, "and we can no longer defend our tenets."

We next advance to the position that belief in miracles, like belief in respect of any other alleged occurrences, must, to be rational, be founded on

evidence of a satisfactory nature ; that *a priori* reasons do little for miracles one way or the other. The Theist who believes in a Supreme Being, attributing to Him will and action, and acknowledging His actual and rightful mastership over himself, cannot, and does not if consistent with his creed, dispute the possibility of miracles being wrought, although he may deem the antecedent likelihood of their performance very small indeed. We therefore at this point demand the credentials, in the way of evidence, of the Gospel Miracles. The nature of the case admits only, of course, of the production of documents recording the testimony given by professed eye-witnesses. Had any palpably miraculous event been witnessed eighteen centuries ago by a thousand persons, we at this day could only have had a declaration by a writer or writers that so many individuals professed to have witnessed what was described in the narrative put forth. If of the witnesses one, or more, were addicted to literary composition, we might have his, or their, account of the matter ; otherwise, the account might come down to us from the pen of some contemporary writer, who only reported what had been told him. In this way, unless certain

extraordinary precautions were taken expressly on behalf of posterity (and even, perhaps, in spite of such precautionary measures), even the best authenticated miracle might easily, in the lapse of years and in the absence of the art of printing, become the subject of discussion and doubt. But now it happens that we have a standing proof, of considerable evidential value, of the fact that many men thought they had seen miracles performed by Jesus. The Christian Church was founded on the basis of the firm belief of such miracles: both miracles said to have been performed by Jesus, as well as unseen miracles performed on Him by Divine power, and attested professedly by the former, constituted an essential part of the subject of the preaching of His first followers. And these men were able to persuade multitudes of Jews and heathens that they were speaking truth when they said that they had witnessed miracles. Also each company of fresh adherents of the Christian faith accepted the miracles as undisputed facts. Now, the good faith of the first preachers of the Christian doctrine is not questioned. At the same time the nature and variety of the Gospel miracles seem to preclude the possibility of the witnesses having been deceived.

What the body of the original Twelve really believed is shown us by the independent testimony of Paul, whose system of teaching is made to hinge on the physical fact of the Resurrection of Jesus. This exactly tallies with the account of the Acts, where the Resurrection of Jesus as witnessed by the Twelve is made the prominent subject of the Apostles' preaching. We have conclusive evidence to show that there was a substantial agreement between St. Paul's Gospel and that of the personal followers of Christ, the keystone of both being the Resurrection of their common Master. That men thought they saw and conversed with one who was known to have died, after His death, and were mistaken in their belief, is a proposition which few unprejudiced persons are likely to entertain. The real matter needing proof, then, is the genuineness of the Apostles' declaration about their Master's reappearance. But, as a matter of fact, the Christian Church appears to have been founded on the very belief in this reappearance: that (in contradiction to repeated statements in the Book of the Acts) the Apostles did not call themselves emphatically witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus, is a point not only destitute of any kind of proof,

but apparently impossible to be true. Even Strauss, denier at the present time not only of the Christian Revelation but of the first principles of Theism, allows that it is absolutely certain that the Apostles both believed and proclaimed the Resurrection of their Master.

Waiving for the moment the question of the genuineness of our present Gospels, we find independent testimony on the part of Christian believers from the close of the first century downwards that they had received the doctrine of Christ's Resurrection, of which the first promulgators were, they unanimously held, the Apostles of the Lord.* Besides, we have several non-Pauline Epistles in the New Testament, which, if we once allow them to be authentic, may be said to settle the present question as to the nature of the Apostolic testimony. And even if the authenticity

* Thus speaks Clement of Rome (about A.D. 100). "The Apostles have preached the Gospel to us from the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, from God. Christ therefore was sent forth by God, and the Apostles by Christ. Having received their orders, and being fully assured by the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and confirmed by the Word of God, with full assurance of the Holy Ghost, they went forth proclaiming that the kingdom of God was at hand."

of every one of them be doubted or arbitrarily denied, the very early date of at least two of the most important of them is incontestably established.*

When we come to the question of the genuineness and authenticity of the Christian records, we find that our present Gospels were known by the names now assigned to them twenty years or more before the end of the second century, and were esteemed by authors of repute the only Canonical Gospels. But although the names of the authors of the Gospels appear for the first time at this period, their contents had been familiar to the general Christian body from a very much earlier date. From the very commencement of the second century apparent citations from all four Gospels are met with in writer after writer, and midway in the century become very numerous.† Even if it be contended that these quotations, or at least some of them, may have come out of other writings (since we know that there were other Gospels and memoirs which have disappeared, leaving but a few

* The First Epistle of Peter is dated by those who deny its authenticity about A.D. 75.

† Possibly John may not be referred to quite as early as the other Evangelists.

traces behind them), still it would only be shown that such other writings were in general agreement with our present Gospels. The really important fact remains untouched, viz., that the earliest Christian writers have recorded most fully their belief in those alleged truths which the Gospel narratives relate—those truths comprising the supernatural facts respecting the person of Jesus, and affording a basis for the full development of Christian doctrine as found in the Epistles.

It becomes, therefore, a matter of less importance to establish the early date of the present form of the Gospels, although, indeed, evidence appears to show that our Gospels were in the hands of "the Fathers" of the generation immediately succeeding that of the Apostles.

No one doubts the authenticity of certain of St. Paul's Epistles, and scarcely any one denies that he maintains the alleged supernatural facts respecting Jesus. Any reader can examine for himself what is the actual testimony of this great Apostle as to the supernatural origin, death, resurrection, ascension, and present glorified state of Christ. We know, too, that he was in accord with Peter and John as regards the substance of this testimony.

We pass on to another line of evidence, just to indicate it. In the hands of certain bitter opponents of Christianity are ancient Hebrew writings, which they esteem sacred. When these Scriptures are put side by side with the Christian Scriptures, there is a surprising correspondence between prediction on the one hand and what seems to be fulfilment on the other. A remarkable feature of these ancient Scriptures was the delineation of a character forming a central figure to which all lines of anticipatory thought converged. Jesus appears to be the realisation of all the numerous scattered predictions which prophet after prophet uttered. We are tempted to ask, "Can there be such a thing as Divine foretelling of events?"

When we put together all that we possess of external testimony to the trustworthiness of the Christian records, and add to it such evidence as is furnished by the nature of the contents of the Christian Revelation—its sublime, if mystical, teaching respecting man's relation to the Supreme Being, and its pure and profound ethics—by the unique character as given us of Him who called Himself the Saviour and by the words attributed to Him—by the effects produced in the world by

the teaching which is based upon the supernatural facts relating to Christ—by the singular correspondence between undoubtedly ancient predictions and apparently true accounts of actual occurrences—when we give due force to the enormous amount of cumulative evidence bearing upon the probable correctness of the Christian scheme, and when we remember that such a scheme, if false in its allegations, must present a vulnerable surface so wide and open that attacks upon it could scarcely fail to overthrow it to the conviction of all sensible and enlightened persons, and yet it stands and perpetuates itself—we are forced, according to our present light, to maintain that appearances are in favour of the supernatural character of the alleged Revelation, and that there is enough in these appearances to make it the part of wisdom to study the Christian doctrine in a spirit of fairness and with humbleness of mind. Such study will certainly not prove fruitless, whatever may be its final issue. It *may* lead the honest doubter, who is really seeking a creed, to the conviction that (according to a reported saying of Jesus) “the doctrine is of God,” and that Christ “spoke not of Himself.”





